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ABSTRACT

This report reviews the facts underlying the debate about delinquency in the United States, focusing on evidence of how well various approaches to crime succeed in practice. Do youth programs such as family therapies and recreation initiatives actually make a cost-effective contribution to controlling crime? Research supports a strong foundation for identifying risk factors early in life, allowing programs to target underlying conditions that propel some youth to crime. Research does not suggest that tougher law enforcement and stricter sanctions are likely to reduce crime significantly. A number of youth-oriented prevention strategies have documented impressive results in reducing criminal, delinquent, and predelinquent behavior. Careful evaluation has supported the contributions of early childhood interventions in reducing eventual crime. Several community-wide prevention efforts and recreation programs such as midnight basketball have been demonstrated to be effective. Prevention through youth programs has been shown to work. An appendix contains a graph of effective prevention efforts. (SLD)

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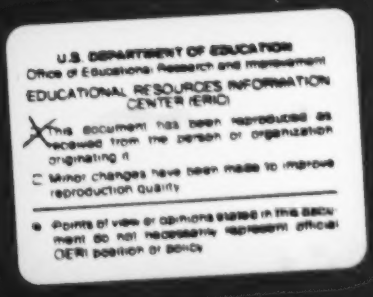
PREVENTION OR PORK?

A Hard-Headed Look at Youth-Oriented Anti-Crime Programs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Richard A. Mendel

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in cooperation with

Center for Youth Development, Academy for Educational Development
Institute for Educational Leadership
National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations
National Crime Prevention Council
National Youth Employment Coalition

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About the Author

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Richard Mendel is an independent writer, researcher and consultant on poverty-related issues in education, employment and training, and community economic development. He worked five years as a staff associate for MDC, Inc., a non-profit employment policy research firm in Chapel Hill, N.C. In addition, Mr. Mendel has done contract work for the Lilly Endowment, Comprehensive Community Revitalization Project (Surdna Foundation), Corporation for Enterprise Development, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Center for Improving Mountain Living, among others. He has written for *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Washington Post*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Washington Monthly*, *Miami Herald*, and others. In 1994, he wrote *The American School-to-Career Movement. A Background Paper for Policymakers and Foundation Officers*. Mr. Mendel holds a bachelor's degree in public policy from Duke University (1983) and an M.A. in journalism from the University of Maryland (1992).

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Publisher's Preface

During the acrimonious and often partisan debate preceding final passage of the "Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994" ("The Crime Bill"), advocates of positive youth development were alternately depressed and cheered.

Depressed to hear many of the programs they supported described as "social spending boondoggles," "social pork," and, sarcastically, as "such stringent anti-crime measures as arts and crafts, self-esteem enhancement, and midnight basketball."

Cheered because, in the new federal legislation, the Congress recognized the value, or at least the potential, of such concepts as "an ounce of prevention," "youth anticrime councils" and other language signifying a positive and comprehensive youth development approach to crime prevention.

The *American Youth Policy Forum* is dedicated to exploring all the various ways by which America's youth may develop into productive workers, successful parents and contributing citizens. The Forum looks upon youth as *whole* people. Youth are not merely students, nor solely future workers, parents, or citizens. They fill multiple roles and have multiple needs. Therefore, what is needed is a coherent *system* of long-term youth development opportunities offered in effective schools, safe neighborhoods, and an economy providing good jobs essential to the support of strong and stable families. When all of these "front-line," "first-chance" subsystems are working well, we believe, the need for youth-oriented crime prevention and treatment programs and criminal justice institutions will be greatly diminished.

For these reasons, the prospect of the new Crime Bill offering recognition and financial backing for state and local crime prevention and youth development initiatives became a matter of considerable interest to the Forum as another building block in a comprehensive strategy of helping the nation's youth make transitions to successful adulthood.

But what is meant by youth-oriented crime prevention? How much is reliably known about the efficacy of the various forms of prevention in helping youth to avoid delinquency and crime altogether? And how much is known about preventing youthful anti-social behavior from developing into serious, even violent, criminal activity?

On these important substantive questions, the Congressional debate on the 1994 Crime Bill was less than helpful. Therefore, the Forum turned to Richard Mendel, an independent writer who had previously demonstrated his ability to synthesize a large body of relevant literature in a short time.* Mendel's assignment: to present a popularly-written, documented summary of what is known from research and evaluation about the effectiveness of the types of youth-oriented prevention strategies that might be supported under the Crime Control Act.

As the 104th Congress prepares to revisit the issues and the prescriptions contained in the 1994 crime control legislation, we present Mr. Mendel's report, published as an aid to informed public discourse.

—Samuel Halperin
American Youth Policy Forum

* See Mendel's *The American School-to-Career Movement: A Background Paper for Policymakers and Foundation Officers*, (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 1994).

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Executive Summary

America has been attempting to solve the crime problem with one arm behind its back. For over a decade, the nation has pursued essentially a one-track strategy for attacking crime: "lock-'em-up." Through mandatory sentences, reduced plea bargaining, restricted parole, and the construction of hundreds of thousands of new prison cells, our nation has more than doubled the number of prisoners behind bars. Yet crime rates have not plummeted, and violent crime remains persistently high.

Make no mistake: Our society has a vital stake in incarcerating serious, violent, chronic criminals. But given the tremendous costs associated with building a spate of new prisons and housing hundreds of thousands of additional prisoners, relying only on increased incarceration to eliminate America's persistent crime epidemic flies in the face of evidence and logic.

Though state and local criminal justice budgets have increased significantly, few new resources have been devoted to steering young people away from crime and violence or to redirecting troubled youth who display signs of delinquency. Some localities have implemented new community-based prevention programs and alternative sentences aimed at rehabilitating youthful offenders, but these remain the exception. Increasingly, states' answer to crime—for juvenile offenders and adults alike—has been the prison cell.

In 1994, Congress staked out a new direction for the nation on crime. In addition to prison construction, increased law enforcement, a host of new death penalties and a "three strikes and you're out" provision requiring lifetime incarceration for three-time felons, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 authorized $7 billion for an array of initiatives in "crime prevention," including many aimed at keeping youth crime free. Among the more promising new initiatives is an emphasis on comprehensive, prevention-focused, community-government partnerships. Rather than punishment and more punishment, the new rubric is punishment *plus* prevention.

This shift in philosophy did not come without a fight. The debate leading to final passage of this law was among the most heated in recent memory. Many opponents ridiculed the bill proposed by the conference committee and lambasted the bill's prevention agenda.

The legislative exchange was long on rhetoric and hyperbole, short on reasoned analysis. *Does prevention work? Does criminological research suggest that prevention deserves a prominent place in the nation's crime control strategy alongside increased incarceration and stepped up law enforcement?* Few legislators and few reporters assigned to cover them took time to consider these questions seriously.

In the end, the crime bill passed with only modest reductions in prevention spending. But a new Congress vows to revisit the legislation in 1995. The political war over crime prevention is beginning again.

This report reviews the facts underlying the delinquency debate—the wealth of scholarly evidence on the causes and correlates of delinquency and existing research examining how well various approaches to crime succeed in practice. Is there a strong rationale for such programs as family therapies, recreation and midnight sports leagues and school-based conflict resolution to prevent or decrease delinquent behavior by youth? Do these programs actually make a cost-effective contribution to controlling crime? Or, rather, is there merit to the critiques that depict prevention efforts as naive, soft-headed, even counterproductive?

By examining these questions carefully, policy makers can govern more wisely on crime. Advocates, reporters, and other interested observers can influence policy makers to conduct the next crime debate on the basis of cold reality rather than colorful rhetoric.

What is the cold reality about crime and crime prevention? A hard-headed look at the evidence reveals several lessons:

1. Research provides a strong foundation for identifying risk factors early in life, which enables us to address the underlying conditions that propel some youth to crime.

The road to violence begins in childhood. Criminologists have long known that a relative handful of serious chronic offenders are responsible for the majority of crime in America. Research documents that violent chronic offenders are most active during

their teen years. Their paths to violence almost always begin with serious behavioral problems in early childhood. While most children who exhibit poor conduct right themselves rather than embark on a life of crime, those who do become chronic offenders typically follow well-worn pathways toward increasingly serious criminality.

Research identifies many risk factors that contribute to youths' propensity for violence and delinquency. Crime-prone youth are more likely to come from families where parents are abusive or neglectful, provide harsh or erratic discipline, or exhibit marital discord. They tend to live in communities rife with drugs, crime, guns, and poverty, where positive role models and safe, constructive recreational opportunities are scarce. They are likely to associate with peers who are delinquent or drug-abusing or to participate in youth gangs. In many cases they are "tracked" at school into classes dominated by low-achieving and trouble-making students.

Several individual characteristics—such as hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, low intelligence—have been linked to delinquency. The presence or lack of self-control, problem-solving skills, and beliefs condemning violence have been identified as key determinants of criminality. Other personal factors—a strong and sustained relationship with at least one adult, an even temperament, and an ability to evoke positive responses in others—have been identified as "protective factors" that can help insulate even high-risk youth from the danger of falling into delinquency. If prevention can address the risks facing many children while boosting protective factors, it will make them less likely to become delinquent.

2. Tougher law enforcement and stricter sanctions are unlikely, in the absence of effective crime prevention, to reduce crime significantly.

Throughout the crime debate of 1994, prevention critics urged that scarce taxpayer dollars go for prison construction to eradicate what they called "revolving door justice"—lenient sentencing and easy parole for serious crimes.

Yet recent experience throughout America proves that incarcerating more criminals for longer periods does not necessarily reduce crime or increase public safety. Between 1975 and 1989, the expected prison time for committing a violent crime nearly tripled. Yet violent crime rates did not decrease dramatically. Between 1980 and 1992 California spent $3.8 billion on prison construction to more than quadruple its prison population, giving it the largest prison population in America and second highest per capita incarceration rate. Yet California's crime rate did not fall—either in absolute terms or relative to other states.

This results from both the failure of deterrence and the impotence of incarceration. For deterrence to work, would-be offenders must be rational in their decision-making and determined to avoid prison. Most crimes are committed in the heat of the moment, however, often under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In many inner city communities, impulsive behavior and a predisposition to violence are the norm, and they may be the immediate, automatic response to any tense situation. Increasingly in tough, urban neighborhoods, prison time is viewed less as a hallmark of shame than as a badge of honor or even a rite of passage.

A second argument for increased incarceration is to take dangerous felons off the streets. Here too, the public safety benefits are limited. The vast majority of crimes committed in America each year (31 million out of 34 million, experts say) go either unreported or unsolved. Though locking up more of those convicted for longer periods can keep some criminals off the streets, many more will continue to roam free. Also, research reveals that the criminal careers of most chronic offenders span only a few years—beginning in the teen years, tapering off steadily during the 20s, and plummeting in the 30s. By the time most criminals have compiled records serious enough to warrant long prison terms, their criminal activity has long since passed its peak.

3. A number of youth-oriented prevention strategies have documented impressive results in reducing criminal, delinquent, and pre-delinquent behavior among young people.

Any doubt that prevention programs can reduce crime are dispelled by several carefully evaluated programs providing intensive assistance to children and their families in the first five years of life. The best known of these is the Perry Preschool program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, forerunner to the present day Head Start program. Long-term follow-up revealed that at age 27, more than 20 years after completing the program, only seven percent of Perry participants had been arrested five or more times, compared with 35 percent of a control group. Family intervention programs have also shown dramatic impact on criminality. Only six percent of participants in a day care assistance and home visiting program in Syracuse, New York were ever processed in juvenile court—versus 22 percent of youth assigned randomly to a control group.

Helping Youth Before Trouble Starts

Many delinquency prevention programs targeted to older children and adolescents have not been implemented on a broad scale. Most that have been tried have typically operated on meager budgets and without careful evaluation.

Nonetheless, the record reveals that several prevention strategies—including both "pure prevention" aimed at the general youth population and "targeted treatment" for those already engaged in problem behaviors—do indeed divert youth from the pathways to crime. Included among them are:

Community-wide Prevention Initiatives. Most impressive of the pure prevention efforts are multi-pronged prevention initiatives designed and implemented by entire communities, particularly those that build on the strengths and interests of youth rather than focusing only on youths' problems and deficits:

- Through its "Success Through Academic and Recreational Support" (STARS) program for high risk youth ages 11-14, Fort Myers, Florida, reduced its juvenile crime rates by almost one-third. Among 11 and 12 year-old offenders citywide, the rate of repeat criminal behavior dropped 64.3 percent.
- Crime went down 60 percent in two troubled Lansing, Michigan, neighborhoods after police, local schools, and a social service agency opened a neighborhood network center and launched an extensive youth development program.
- Norfolk, Virginia, forged a partnership between police, human service agencies, and local citizens to combat crime in ten high crime neighborhoods. The initiative—which included new youth athletic leagues and a Youth Forum for teens to speak on community problems as well as other prevention measures—led to a 29 percent drop in crime in the targeted neighborhoods and a citywide reduction in violent crime.
- San Antonio, Texas, has employed a variety of initiatives including after-school programs and penalties against youth (and their parents) for carrying weapons, painting graffiti, or violating youth curfews in an anti-crime partnership between community residents and police. In the program's first year, arrests for juvenile crime dropped by ten percent and juvenile victimization fell by 50 percent.

Multi-Dimensional Violence Prevention in Schools. Conflict resolution and violence prevention curricula have swept the nation in recent years. Several programs have documented impacts on students' beliefs and conflict resolution skills and on students' self-reported behavior. The best of these programs reach beyond the classroom into the entire school and the broader community.

Resolving Conflicts Creatively (RCC), a Brooklyn, New York-based program, combines violence prevention classes with peer mediation and parent training to change the total school environment. In one early evaluation, 70 percent of teachers involved in the program reported that RCC reduced fighting among participating students. Teens, Crime, and the Community, a national curriculum, challenges students to examine and act on real crime issues and take preventive action. It has been shown to improve students' attitudes and knowledge and to reduce their likelihood of delinquency.

Recreation Programs. Though midnight basketball became the brunt of many a rhetorical attack, leagues have been spreading rapidly across the country in recent years—often with active support from local law enforcement agencies. Particularly when they require participation in life skills workshops and other constructive activities as a prerequisite for playing, these leagues have helped to bring down crime rates in sponsoring communities. The original league in Glenarden, Maryland, is credited with reducing crime by 60 percent. In the Winton Hills section of Cincinnati, crime rates plummeted 24 percent within 13 weeks after a late night recreation program was initiated.

Other recreation and youth development activities can be equally effective. Researchers at Columbia University found that the presence of a Boys & Girls Club in a public housing project reduced crime rates by 13 percent and drug use by more than 20 percent.

Treating Troubled Youth

Prevention can work. Particularly when communities come together to offer youth a continuum of programs and services, and provide youth the opportunity for supportive and sustained relationships with caring adults, and the chance to assume constructive roles in the community, the effect on youth can be appreciable. But these purely preventive efforts do not deal with youth already in trouble. The majority of crimes are committed by a relative handful of repeat offenders who typically display serious behavior problems in early childhood. For

them, more intensive, individualized treatment will likely be required.

What is the record of treatment or intervention programs in redirecting troubled youth? Though some types of treatment have proven to be far more effective than others, the overall answer can be summed up in two words: "quite promising."

Family Therapies. The most impressive interventions focus on the families of troubled youth—even youth with serious behavior problems. One approach, multi-systemic family therapy (MST) reduced rearrest rates among incarcerated youth by almost half. Youths who received MST spent an average of 73 fewer days behind bars in the year following treatment than did youths in a control group.

Other family interventions have also shown dramatic results. When Parent Management Training (PMT) was provided to parents of problem children ages 3-8, the children fared far better than a control group of children assigned to a waiting list for the program. Overall, between two-thirds and three-fourths of the PMT children achieved clinically significant change and returned to a normal range of behavioral functioning. PMT has also been found effective with adolescents—even those with serious juvenile crime records.

Cognitive Training. Another set of promising intervention programs aims to develop in troubled youth the social and cognitive skills necessary to avoid conflict and control aggression. Children raised in strong families, quality schools, and healthy communities typically develop these skills as a matter of course. Among high risk and delinquent youth they are often lacking. Research shows that focused training in social problem-solving, anger management, moral reasoning and perspective-taking can make a significant difference both with children displaying early signs of delinquency and with youth already incarcerated for serious offenses. These programs can be delivered for only a small fraction of the cost of incarcerating offenders in juvenile or adult prisons; the best programs have demonstrated the capacity to reduce crime rates.

The Positive Adolescent Choices Training (PACT) program teaches negotiation, compromise, and a variety of anger management skills to troubled African American adolescents. A recent study showed that only 18 percent of PACT participants were referred to juvenile court in the three years after training compared with 49 percent of a randomly assigned control group.

A number of other treatment approaches have also been shown to reduce criminality. Providing delinquent youth intensive contact with college student volunteers under the guidance of graduate students and university faculty has proved successful in several tests. Youthful offenders ordered to pay restitution to their victims or perform service to the community have lower recidivism rates than those for whom restitution or service is not ordered. Sentencing juveniles to appropriate correctional programs, based in the community whenever possible, rather than only to "training schools" or other large-scale detention facilities has proved a cost-effective strategy in Massachusetts and other states; recidivism and juvenile crime rates have remained low in these states.

4. Other prevention strategies have not been proven effective—most because they have not been subject to rigorous evaluation, a few because evaluations have found little or no positive impact. Further investments in research and evaluation of crime prevention are clearly justified.

Several popular strategies—including most school-based conflict resolution, peer mediation, and gang prevention efforts—have not yet been rigorously evaluated. Hundreds of these programs are being tested throughout the country, and several show great promise.

Other prevention approaches have proved ineffective in repeated tests. Shock incarceration (i.e., boot camps) does not reduce criminality, studies show. Short-term, "quick fix" job training has not lowered arrest rates. Neither traditional psychotherapy nor behavior modification has shown great promise as a vehicle for redirecting delinquent and criminal youth. A few efforts—mostly scare-oriented programs or programs that place groups of delinquent youth together for extended treatment—have actually worsened the behavior of participants.

5. States and the federal government need to develop and implement prevention programs aggressively, taking care to learn from experience. Research and evaluation must be important elements in all prevention efforts.

A cost-effective approach to crime requires more than punishment. America cannot jail away its crime problem by warehousing criminals, young or old. It cannot solve crime solely through deterrence, or by "shocking" trouble-prone youth or "scaring them straight." Rather, to help children and youth grow into productive, constructive adults, they must be

supervised, supported, educated, encouraged, cared for and given opportunities to contribute. And they must have positive opportunities for recreation, exploration, and personal growth.

For some youth, particularly those from high-risk families and communities, cognitive skills training and family counseling will also be required. And to be effective, these treatments must be carefully crafted, research-based, and effectively implemented.

To date, nowhere in America have all of these pieces been pulled together in one community, although a number of places are trying to do so. Nowhere has the impact of well-defined, youth-oriented crime prevention programs been fully realized. Prevention's potential remains untapped.

Given the high costs and dubious benefits to be expected from continuing on the lock-'em-up path, and given the encouraging results of many youth-oriented prevention and intervention strategies, a significant public investment is surely warranted both to strengthen and expand a youth-oriented prevention agenda and to step up the effort to refine and improve on prevention's promise.

Throwing money at prevention will not solve America's crime problem. But ignoring prevention is an even worse alternative. Both to protect ourselves and to secure our children's future, prevention must become a mainstay in our nation's crime control strategy. A two-armed approach to crime is long overdue.

(Citations for the main points in this Executive Summary may be found in the Research Notes at the end of this paper.)

Introduction:
A Look Back at the Crime Debate of 1994

Surmounting many hurdles and extremely heated argument, Congress completed action on the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act on August 25, 1994. The conference report on the $30.2 billion authorization—including $7 billion for prevention—cleared the House of Representatives by 235 (188 Democrats, 46 Republicans, 1 Independent) to 195 (64 Democrats and 131 Republicans). On the Senate side, 61 Senators (54 Democrats and 7 Republicans) voted for final approval versus 38 opponents (36 Republicans and 2 Democrats).

In the preceding debate, critics of preventative strategies unleashed a gale-force rhetorical assault. They derided the crime bill as a "train wreck," "boondoggle" and "unholy trinity of pork, posturing and partisanship," to cite but three examples. Critics assailed many provisions of the bill but they aimed their sharpest, most biting attacks at the dollars proposed for "crime prevention"—especially programs designed to help at-risk youth stay crime-free. The critics double-damned these programs as "social pork," short both for social programs (i.e., welfare) and for pork barrel (i.e., wasteful) spending. Their vitriolic rhetoric indicted delinquency prevention as a wasteful, even ridiculous, response to youthful violence. Their critique was stark and simple and seemed to resonate with many voters:

"[The bill squanders] billions upon billions of dollars in scarce crime-fighting resources on gauzy social spending schemes straight out of the failed Great Society of the 1960s," Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) told the Senate.[1] "Over $9 billion is included for vague social spending to finance such stringent anticrime measures as arts and crafts, self-esteem enhancement, and midnight basketball," said Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX). "All this on the theory that the person who stole your car, robbed your house, and assaulted your family was no more than a disgruntled artist or would-be NBA star."[2]

Prevention's defenders scurried to counter these attacks. They suggested that the opponents were inspired more by the National Rifle Association's opposition to an assault weapons ban than on principled opposition to crime prevention. And they accused the bill's opponents of hypocrisy—noting that many had supported prior versions of the crime bill that included billions for prevention.

What prevention supporters did not do, however, was to offer an effective defense of the crime bill's prevention agenda as a realistic strategy to fight crime. The President refused to countenance large cuts in prevention programs, but for the most part he and Congressional advocates defended such programs only in vague terms of equity and balance—not safety.

Thus emerged a glaring knowledge gap in the public discourse over crime. Namely: **Does Prevention Work?** Were the critics correct: Is there no place in a hard-headed anti-crime strategy for youth-targeted crime prevention initiatives? Are more police, mandatory sentences, restricted parole, and continued prison construction the best or the only reasonable approaches to crime?

Or, as many criminologists, community activists, law enforcement officials, and big city mayors argue, do delinquency prevention programs represent an important and cost-effective component—even a necessary component—in an enlightened and rational approach to combatting crime and violence in America?

Community organizations and local, state, and federal agencies have tested many youth-targeted crime prevention programs over the past several decades. Scholars have assembled an extensive body of research on the causes and correlates of crime, and they have evaluated the impact of many policy and program approaches for combatting crime.

What does this record tell us about the potential effectiveness of delinquency prevention? Are at-risk youth and already delinquent youth amenable to intervention programs? Which, if any, program models have proved effective in reducing criminal behavior? Which have proved ineffective? Has prevention earned a place beside law enforcement and corrections in a comprehensive national anti-crime agenda? Or not?

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The dust of summer 1994's acrimonious debate has now settled. But the battle over prevention has really just begun. While significant new funds have been authorized for youth-targeted crime prevention, the new Republican majority in Congress (as stated in its "Contract With America") will soon revisit the crime bill. Many members apparently aim to gut prevention programs in favor of more prison construction. Even if they fail, funds for prevention will have to be appropriated by Congress each of the six years covered by the new law. And at the state and local level, where much of the authority for directing the federal funds resides, decisions will have to be made where and how prevention efforts will be undertaken.

Before politicians on both sides of the Congressional aisle resume that debate, they—and their staffs, the media, advocacy groups, and state and local leaders—would do well to review the facts about delinquency prevention and to place prevention efforts in proper context. This report is intended to assist them in that endeavor.

Why Prevention? A Brief Look at Youth, Crime and Public Policy

FACT 1: The peak age of arrestees for serious violent crimes in America is 18. Arrests for violent acts taper off drastically by age 29.[3]

FACT 2: Adolescence is a period of heightened risk among all youth. More than one fourth of male adolescents commit at least one violent offense before reaching adulthood.[4]

FACT 3: Despite the prevalence of delinquent behavior, a small proportion of adolescents (6 percent) are responsible for two-thirds of all violent crimes committed by juveniles. About 40 percent of arrests for all serious crime is accounted for by youth between the ages of 10 and 20 years old.[5]

These striking facts underscore two critical facets of the American crime problem. First, violent criminal activity occurs disproportionately among the young. Second, while many adolescents may flirt with delinquency and crime, the major threat to public safety is posed by a tiny minority of individuals, mostly males, who embark on extended, often violent criminal careers. These realities make clear a third truth: making America safer is primarily a function of incapacitating serious violent offenders; if possible, providing effective treatment for them; and preventing youth from lapsing into either episodic or chronic criminal activity.

Over the past 15 years, our approach to crime has increasingly concentrated on incarceration—attempting to incapacitate criminals. Prison construction, mandatory sentencing, and strict new limits on parole and probation have been the priorities, with the result that the nation's prison population—already the largest in the free world—has more than doubled since 1980. Yet crime has not gone away.

Through the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, America has for the first time in decades placed significant emphasis—and tax dollars—on the second half of the public safety equation: preventing criminal behavior. Does this new emphasis and investment make sense? That is the $7 billion question.

An informed answer requires detailed understanding of the crime problem. What is the nature of America's crime epidemic? How is it changing? Who is committing crime, and what factors have been proven to contribute to or deter their criminal behavior?

A hard-headed look into these questions reveals that the case for including prevention as a central element of a comprehensive national crime control strategy is compelling. This is true for two reasons:

1. **Prevention shows significant promise to identify potential risk factors for youth early in life and to address the underlying conditions that propel them toward lives of crime; and**

2. **In the absence of effective prevention, tougher law enforcement and stricter sanctions are unlikely to reduce the crime problem significantly.**

The Promise of Prevention

The road to violent crime begins in childhood. In fact, most who follow that road begin the journey long before reaching the age of majority.

According to a comprehensive multi-year survey of American youth, serious violent offending most commonly begins at ages 15 or 16. Violent behavior peaks at age 18 and declines sharply thereafter. It is rare for anyone who has not exhibited serious violent behavior by age 20 ever to become a violent offender.[6]

Of course, some level of rebelliousness and mischief-making is considered a natural part of adolescence, and a substantial majority of youth crime is non-violent. Yet a considerable minority of youth commit at least one act of violence before they turn 18. For most youth this antisocial behavior ceases with time. More than 80 percent of those who

commit a violent offense during adolescence terminate their violence by age 21, and the "criminal careers" of most violent youthful offenders span only one year.[7]

Thus, while the occasional criminal and violent acts committed by otherwise healthy adolescents represent a serious problem, perhaps increasingly so, the most dangerous source of crime remains, as always, a deviant cadre of chronic offenders deeply engaged in criminal behaviors.

Pathways to Crime

"Adult criminality seems to be always preceded by childhood misconduct," report criminologists Robert J. Sampson and John H. Laub.[8]

This fact, that virtually all career criminals display early warning signs before reaching adulthood, provides an important ingredient for prevention: if risk factors for youth at high risk for violence can be identified early, they might be provided effective remedial treatment and diverted from the road to violence.

Over the past several decades, and especially since the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act passed in 1974, extensive research has identified the common characteristics of chronic offenders, the conditions—personal, familial, social, or educational—that seem to contribute to delinquent behavior, and the factors that seem to prevent repeat offenders from "growing out of it" and returning to the straight-and-narrow, like the majority of other youths who get into trouble.

> *Children who demonstrate antisocial behavior come from very nonsupportive families at two extremes: either the family is repressive and abusive, or it seriously neglects the child from the early years on. Surprisingly, parental neglect is almost as strong a predictor of subsequent violence as physical abuse, and parental rejection is the most powerful prediction of all. In one study, 50 percent of children rejected by their parents went on to commit serious crimes, versus only 20 percent of abused and neglected children.*
>
> *Joy Dryfoos*

Perhaps most striking is the finding that the pathways toward crime are well-marked. Across subcultures, over time, the behavior patterns leading to chronic criminal behavior are distinct—and they almost always involve serious behavior problems in early childhood.

"In early childhood, some boys and girls begin to show patterns of aggressive behavior in their family, in their schools, in their interaction with peers, or in their activities in the community. They pick fights with their brothers and sisters, scream at their parents, verbally attack their teachers, bully their peers, and intimidate younger children in the neighborhood," writes Ronald Slaby, a crime prevention expert at the Education Development Center and Harvard University. This behavior is "the best predictor of chronic delinquent offending and violence in adolescence."[9]

Most children who display antisocial tendencies do not go on to become juvenile delinquents or career criminals—most do not. But those who do become chronic offenders typically follow a common progression of increasingly serious behaviors: problems begin with defiance, lying or bullying, followed by fighting among individuals or gangs, and then serious violent behavior starting with aggravated assault and leading (in some cases) to rape, robbery, and perhaps homicide. Early alcohol abuse (often marijuana abuse as well) precedes the slide into violence for the vast majority of serious offenders. Subsequent violent behavior is often associated with use of other illicit drugs such as cocaine and heroin.[10]

"Adult antisocial behavior virtually *requires* childhood antisocial behavior," explains Lee Robins.[11] Yet, for the most part, children who display warning signs of violence receive little focused attention. They may be punished by parents or teachers, or suspended from school, but seldom are they engaged in a well-designed program to address the underlying causes of their problem behavior.

The Causes and Correlates of Crime

What is it that leads these youth to violence? Here again, the work of criminologists, psychologists, sociologists, and public health scholars sheds light. Through hundreds of studies their research has identified critical risk factors in five domains:

Family: "Children who demonstrate antisocial behavior come from very nonsupportive families at two extremes: either the family is repressive and abusive, or it seriously neglects the child from the early years on," reports Joy G. Dryfoos, a leading scholar on adolescence.[12] Surprisingly, parental

neglect is almost as strong a predictor of subsequent violence as physical abuse, and parental rejection is the most powerful predictor of all. In one study, 50 percent of children rejected by their parents went on to commit serious crimes, versus only 20 percent of abused and neglected children.[13]

As veteran criminologist Travis Hirschi has put it, "the closer the child's relationship with his parents, the more he is attached to and identified with them, the lower his chances of delinquency."[14] This finding holds in one- and two-parent families alike. As studies have concluded, "Parental absence due to divorce or separation has been found to have either a small or inconsistent association with adolescent delinquency,"[15] while marital conflict in two parent families "is strongly associated with juvenile delinquency and conduct disorder."[16]

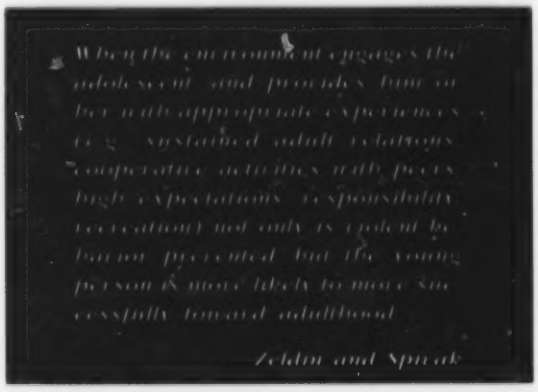
Neighborhood: Growing up in an underclass neighborhood is closely correlated with increased risk of delinquency. Of course, most poor people are not criminals. Prevalence of drugs, crime, guns, and poverty have been identified as causes of delinquency, as has the lack of positive role models, thriving community-based organizations, quality schools, adequately funded social services, cohesive community leadership, and safe and constructive recreational opportunities. "The inclination to violence springs from the circumstances of life among the ghetto poor—the lack of jobs that pay a living wage, the stigma of race, the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and lack of hope for the future," writes Elijah Anderson, a University of Pennsylvania urban anthropologist who has spent many years observing and documenting the often dangerous and deviant behavioral dynamics of the inner city.[17]

Peer Groups: Frequent association with delinquent and drug-using peers or participation in a youth gang are also critical indicators of delinquency. Unlike adult crime, the majority of youth crime is committed in groups.[18] In fact, writes Delbert Elliott, "The strongest and most immediate cause of the actual onset of serious violent behavior is involvement with a delinquent peer group. It is here that violence is modeled, encouraged, and rewarded; and justifications for disengaging one's moral obligation to others are taught and reinforced."[19] Membership in a youth gang is an especially powerful risk factor, though gangs can provide youth a sense of belonging, plus some safety from real dangers, extended involvement in a gang leads to "exceptionally high rates of delinquency."[20]

School: "While patterns of behavior learned in early childhood carry over into the school context, the school has its own potential for generating conflict and frustration and violent responses to these situations," Elliott writes. "During junior and senior high school, a clear adolescent status hierarchy emerges, and much of the violence at school is related to competition for status and status-related confrontations. Ability tracking also contributes to a collective adaptation to school failure and peer rejection by grouping academically poor students and those who are aggressive troublemakers together in the same classes. Delinquent peer groups tend to emerge out of these classes and individual feelings of anger, rejection and alienation are mutually reinforced in these groups."[21]

Though there is some evidence that delinquent behavior subsides somewhat in the months immediately after dropping out (due to reduced feelings of failure and frustration),[22] the overwhelming overrepresentation of school dropouts among the nation's prison population confirms the powerful ongoing link between school failure and criminal behavior.

Individual factors: In addition to these external factors, several individual characteristics can also predispose youth to violence. Hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder are closely correlated with delinquency, as is low intelligence.[23] Many children who exhibitbehavior problems demonstrate maladaptive beliefs, thought processes, and behavior patterns that predispose them to violence. Children may attribute hostility to peers where none is intended. They may lack basic problem-solving skills or the ability to identify non-violent solutions when social problems arise. They may hold beliefs justifying violence in a wide variety of situations, and they may resort to violence quickly in conflict situations. "Under conditions of high emotional arousal," reports Harvard's Ronald Slaby, "aggressive individuals are likely to default almost automatically to learned stereotypic patterns of behavior that are often both violent and inappropriate for the


When the environment engages the adolescent and provides him or her with appropriate experiences (e.g., sustained adult relations cooperative activities with peers high expectations responsibility recreation) not only is violent behavior prevented but the young person is more likely to move successfully toward adulthood.
Zeldin and Spivak

The consensus today is delinquency prevention programs can work. In fact, these programs often do work—but only when they are intensive, oriented to youth development, multidimensional, carefully designed, effectively implemented, and constantly evaluated with an eye to improving program performance.

situation."[23] These social skill deficits have been the focus of several delinquency programs in recent times—some with highly successful results.

Resiliency Against Risk

These risk factors explain much about who becomes a criminal and who doesn't. They provide important clues for the formulation of effective prevention strategies. If prevention can improve parenting skills and family cohesion in high-risk households, if it can reduce (or ameliorate) the negative influences youth experience in their neighborhoods and schools, if it can intervene to inhibit the formation or expansion of deviant peer groups, prevention can make a major contribution to our nation's struggle against crime.

Yet these risk factors tell only part of the prevention story. "A striking finding of studies of risk factors associated with offending is that many adolescents who are exposed to risk factors do *not* become delinquent," reports the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment. "Studies have found that a positive temperament, including positive mood and a tendency to evoke positive responses in others, a high IQ, positive school and work experiences, high self-esteem, some degree of structure in the environment, and one good relationship with a parent or other adult reduce the risk factors associated with offending."[24]

"Research has demonstrated that healthy bonding is a significant factor in children's resistance to crime and drugs," explain David Hawkins and Richard Catalano of the University of Washington. "Strong positive bonds have three important components: (1) *attachment*—positive relations with others; (2) *commitment*—an investment in the future; and (3) *belief* about what is right and wrong, with an orientation to positive, moral behavior and action."[25]

"A variety of social experiences may contribute to violence... Yet none of these social experiences or sources of social interaction, singly or in combination, will inevitably lead to violent behavior for all individuals," writes Ronald Slaby. "Much like a physiological immune system, learned patterns of psychological mediation are capable of succumbing to, neutralizing, or counteracting the impact of experiences that act as violence toxins."[26]

This potential for resiliency, this capacity of youth to overcome troubling influences and develop into healthy, productive, law-abiding adults, provides a second critical underpinning for prevention. Not just a means to treat behavior disorders or solve social problems, prevention can also be a vehicle for building up this social "immune system" in high risk youth—creating a moral compass, so to speak, a commitment to prosocial values combined with the skills, knowledge, and thought processes necessary to avoid the temptations and pressures that lead to violence.

"Understanding [the] risk factors [for violence] is a first step toward identifying effective means of prevention," write Hawkins and Catalano, whose "social development strategy" underlies the comprehensive approach to serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders advocated by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. "Equally important is the evidence that certain *protective factors* can help shield youngsters from problems. If we can reduce risks while increasing protection throughout the course of young people's development, we can prevent these problems and promote healthy, pro-social growth."[27]

The Limitations of Law and Order

"Whatever happened to deterrence? Whatever happened to actually carrying out severe penalties for those who commit heinous crimes?" asked Rep. Bob Stump (R-AZ) in the heat of the 1994 crime debate.[28] "We should not be spending social welfare money out here like this," echoed Rep. Bill McCollum (R-FL). "We need to put certainty and swiftness and punishment back into the system again. We need to have deterrence of criminal laws in this country, deterrence of crime, which is true prevention."[29]

"Revolving-door justice," the fact that many convicts serve far less time than they are sentenced to, lay at the heart of the argument in 1994 against devoting scarce public resources to crime prevention. "Our nation's criminal justice system lacks credibility because we have failed to provide an adequate deterrent to crime and enough places to

lock up hardened criminals and throw away the key,"[30] argued Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), now chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

To bolster their case, Hatch and others presented disturbing information on the failure of courts to punish criminals severely. For instance, violent offenders serve on average only 37 percent of the prison time they are sentenced to. Murderers are sentenced to an average of 15 years but serve only seven; rapists are sentenced to eight years on average but serve only three.[31]

Such statistics, combined with news stories (and political advertisements) depicting seasoned criminals committing heinous crimes after early release

> *For the most part, young people do not avoid crime from fear of punishment. They avoid crime out of respect for themselves, concern for others, a belief in their future prospects and an internal sense of personal and public morality. Developing this internalized morality, fostering in young people the skills and the will to avoid crime, is the business of the whole community and the key to youth-oriented crime prevention.*

from prison, make a powerful impression on the voting public. But politics aside, can a national crime strategy based solely on increased incarceration—coupled with other "law and order" remedies like the death penalty and widespread waivers to try juvenile offenders as adults—make a significant dent in the American crime problem? A hard look at the criminological evidence suggests the answer is no.

Crime and Punishment in California

Between 1984 and 1991, California enacted more than 1,000 new criminal statutes either to lengthen prison sentences or upgrade misdemeanor offenses to felonies. At the same time, California courts dramatically intensified their monitoring of probationers and parolees, sending tens of thousands of convicts back to prison. As a result, the state quadrupled its prison population—from 22,500 in 1980 to over 106,000 in 1992—giving it the largest prison population and the second highest incarceration rate (311 prisoners per 100,000 population) in the nation. California spent $3.8 billion on prison construction during this period, boosting the prison system's share of state spending from 2 percent in 1981-82 to over 6 percent in 1991-92. Yet California's crime problem did not improve—either in absolute terms or in comparison with other states. Rather, crime remained stable, with violent crime rates increasing and property crimes decreasing.[32]

"The data indicate that the money spent in California on prison construction was money wasted," writes Franklin Zimring from the University of California, Berkeley. "The almost quadrupling of prison capacity seemed to make little difference when it came to curbing the rate of violent crime."[33]

Other studies have been more favorable toward increased incarceration as a means of reducing crime. According to Michael Block of the University of Arizona, the 10 states that increased their prison populations fastest in the 1980s experienced more than a 20 percent decline in overall crime rates, compared with a 9 percent increase in the 10 states which increased their incarceration rates the least.[34]

Most researchers draw a different conclusion, however. "Several recent studies have attempted to sort out the relationship between imprisonment and crime," reports Joan Petersilia, former director of the RAND Corporation's Criminal Justice Program. "The research results are surprisingly consistent: Prison has a marginal crime prevention (incapacitation effect, but it is not large enough to reduce overall crime rates significantly."[35]

Perhaps the most complete information comes from the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Understanding and Preventing Violence. "The increments to crime control from incapacitation are modest, even with very large general increases in inmate populations," the Panel found in 1986.[36] More recently, the panel reported that "sentencing policy became much harsher" between 1975 and 1989. "Increases in both a convicted violent offender's chance of being imprisoned and the average prison time served if imprisoned at all combined to cause a near tripling of the expected prison time served per violent crime."[37]

Yet the number of violent crimes committed in America was the same in 1989 as in 1975—2.9 million. "This suggests that by itself the criminal justice response to violence could accomplish no more than running in place," the panel found. "An effective control strategy must also include preventing violent events before they happen."[38]

The Impact of Incarceration

How can this be? How can increasing the severity of punishment and removing more criminals from

the streets for longer periods of time not make us appreciably safer? A look at the criminological evidence reveals two causes: the impotence of deterrence, and the weak effects of incapacitation.

Deterrence. The criminal justice system's primary means of promoting public safety is deterrence—preventing crime by discouraging potential offenders with the threat of punishment. For deterrence to be effective, would-be offenders must be rational in their decision making and see imprisonment as an unacceptable consequence of offending. Especially within the inner city, real life often meets neither of these conditions.

"Much individual crime (particularly violent crime) is an impulsive response to an immediate stressful situation and is often committed under the influence of drugs and or alcohol," Petersilia writes. "If crime is highly impulsive, then rational choice models, which attempt to convince the offender that crime doesn't pay by increasing penalties, have limited utility for crime control."[39]

This impulsive behavior is colored by the behavioral and moral norms internalized by would-be offenders during childhood and modeled in their families, schools, and communities. "By the time they are teenagers, most [inner city] youths have either internalized the code of the streets or at least learned the need to comport themselves in accordance with its rules," observes Elijah Anderson. "It's basic requirement is the display of a certain predisposition to violence."[40]

"Unfortunately, for too many youth, violence is either the only or the most effective way to achieve status, respect, and other basic social and personal needs," writes Delbert Elliott.

"Prison is most likely to deter if it meets two conditions," Petersilia writes, "social standing is injured by the punishment and the punishment is severe in comparison to the benefits of the crime."[41] Unfortunately, for many urban youth neither condition holds true. "Many street-oriented boys are much more concerned about the threat of 'justice' at the hands of a peer than at the hands of police," Anderson finds. "Moreover, many feel not only that they have little to lose by going to prison but that they have something to gain. The toughening up one experiences in prison can actually enhance one's reputation on the streets."[42]

Incapacitating Criminals. A second purpose for incarcerating criminals is to separate them from the community and prevent them from committing more crime. "I think it's fair to say that we don't know how to rehabilitate the serious repeat offenders," says James Q. Wilson of the University of California at Los Angeles, "so the goal has to be: to protect society and make it clear... that society is not going to tolerate this behavior by ignoring it or winking at it."[43]

Yet the National Academy of Sciences panel found the criminal justice system's increased use of prison from 1975 to 1989 prevented just 10 to 15 percent of potential violent crimes.[44] The crime-reducing effects of incarceration are necessarily limited for several reasons. First, the great majority of crimes in America never lead to an arrest or conviction. Of the 34 million crimes committed in 1990, 31 million went unreported or unsolved.[45] Even if those arrested include many chronic offenders, the supply of potential criminal recruits is seemingly endless in many neighborhoods. As Petersilia puts it, "the ability of back-end strategies (such as imprisonment) to increase public safety is severely limited because of the replenishing supply of young people who are entering criminal careers."[46]

This problem is compounded by the poor performance of the criminal justice system in selecting whom to incarcerate. As young adults, chronic offenders often receive light sentences because criminal court judges and prosecutors are unaware of offenders' juvenile records. "In a national survey of prosecutors, half the respondents said they normally received little or no juvenile record information on even the most serious young adult offenders in their jurisdiction," reports *Congressional Quarterly*. "When juvenile records were available, they were often incomplete or arrived too late to affect decisions on whether or not to file criminal charges."[47] Rather than incapacitating

> *A healthy community not only benefits youth who already have many assets in their favor, but is particularly powerful in protecting vulnerable youth who have fewer personal assets (such as strong families) in their lives. Schools, churches and synagogues, youth organizations, and the general support of structured activities are clearly influential in shaping a healthy community for youth.*
>
> *Search Institute*

chronic offenders at the height of their careers, prison terms are usually imposed when criminal activity is beginning to taper off. In California, for instance, while the average age of arrest is 17, the average age of first commitment to prison is 26 and the median age of new prison admissions is 29—about the age most criminal careers are coming to a close.[48]

Another factor limiting the crime-reducing impact of incarceration is evidence that imprisonment ultimately increases the criminality of those who serve time. One recent study followed matched pairs of offenders (convicted of similar crimes, with similar demographics and criminal records) who were sentenced differently—one to prison, one to probation. The study found that those sent to prison were more likely to be arrested over the subsequent three years than those given probation.[49] The criminogenic effects of prison may be especially strong for youthful offenders, write Sampson and Laub. "Imprisonment may have powerful negative effects on the prospects for future employment and job stability. In turn, low income, unemployment, and underemployment are themselves linked to heightened risks of family disruption. Through its negative effects on male employment, imprisonment may thus lead through family disruption to increases in future rates of crime and violence."[50]

Death Penalties and Juvenile Justice

Two other 'law and order' approaches'—both included in the 1994 crime act with bipartisan support—similarly hold limited promise to reduce the crime threat: death penalties, and the widespread use of waivers to try juvenile offenders as adults.

As has been widely documented, there exists no credible evidence that the death penalty deters crime. One recent study, for instance, compared violent crime rates in 293 pairs of counties that border along a state line. The analysis found that, taking into account demographics and other relevant factors, the states' use of the death penalty had no significant impact on violent crime; in fact, counties in states where the death penalty is widely used showed higher rates of violent crime than those in counties where executions are performed seldom or not at all.[51] The death penalty may be justified as an expression of public will, or as fair punishment for heinous crimes, but it simply does not make our streets safer.

Less understood is another key intent of the new crime law—to try increasing numbers of juvenile offenders as adults. Between the early 1970s and 1987, the proportion of youthful offenders referred to adult criminal courts increased from 1 percent to 5 percent. Between 1987 and 1991, the number of juvenile cases transferred to criminal courts jumped another 29 percent nationwide, from 7,000 to 9,000.[52] This growing reliance on adult courts is rooted in a perception that young criminals are being coddled by a rehabilitation-minded juvenile justice system.

However, many juvenile justice experts deny that serious offenders are receiving lenient treatment, and they argue that diverting youthful offenders from the juvenile system—particularly nonviolent offenders—is counterproductive.

In many states, the sentences meted out by juvenile courts are no less severe than those dealt youthful offenders in criminal court. In California, for instance, youth convicted of homicide, kidnapping, robbery, and assault in juvenile courts actually serve longer sentences than adults and youth convicted in criminal court. Youth convicted of homicide serve an average of 60 months, compared with 41 months for those convicted in criminal court.[53] In some states, juvenile courts are more lenient. In New Mexico, for instance, a murderer convicted in juvenilecourt faces a maximum sentence of two years; when convicted as adults, murderers face a life sentence or the death penalty.

Overall, "It does not appear that juveniles receive harsher penalties, on the average, when transferred to criminal courts for a broad range of offenses," conclude criminologists Dean J. Champion and G. Larry Mays. Roughly half the juvenile cases transferred to adult court each year are dismissed for lack of evidence, Champion reports. Many of the rest are spared harsh sentences by judges accustomed to hardened adult criminals. "The kids go from being big-time juvenile actors to small-time criminal actors," Champion says. "The likelihood is they will get probation."[54]

A 1991 study comparing the sentencing of 16-to-17 year-olds accused of robbery and burglary in New York and New Jersey found that juvenile courts were no less severe than adult courts. Moreover, the study found that youth treated in the juvenile justice system "were rearrested less often, at a lower rate and after a longer crime-free period."[55]

This outcome confirms the fears of many juvenile justice advocates: that youth treated as adults, and particularly those sentenced to adult prisons, may be hardened into chronic criminality. Adult prisons typically do not provide the types of rehabilitation programs offered in juvenile detention settings. Yet the majority of juveniles waived to adult courts are not violent offenders: only 34 percent of cases

transferred to adult courts in 1991 involved crimes against persons—and not all of these were for violent crimes.[56] Most waivers go to youth accused of property or drug crimes—youth for whom rehabilitation is a viable and appropriate option."

Toward a Comprehensive Approach

Our society has a vital stake in incarcerating serious violent offenders—adults or juveniles—who wreak havoc on our streets. A major goal of public policy must be to redress the breakdowns—remaining leniency in state juvenile justice statutes, and communication gaps between juvenile and criminal courts—that allow many young villains to avoid long prison terms during their most destructive years.

However, the fact remains: on their own, incarceration simply cannot effect a significant reduction in crime. Too few criminals are deterred by the threat (or reality) of increasing prison terms, and too many adolescents are poised to replace those who are shipped off to prison.

Critics of the 1994 crime bill reveled in labeling it "a full employment program for social workers." Yet the punitive alternative can just as accurately be depicted as a full employment program for construction workers and prison guards. The costs of prison construction alone ran to $4.9 billion in the latest fiscal year,[57] and the tab for housing a juvenile or adult prison inmate range from $15,000 to upwards of $40,000 per year. In terms of crime reduction, the potential pay-off from this investment is modest.

"Those who focus on the criminal justice system are offering the public a false hope, the hope that if the criminal justice system just did its job more competently—and criminals were punished more often and more harshly—the public would be safe from most crime," writes Joan Petersilia. "The public gets some comfort from statistics showing that arrests and imprisonments are going up. But if 34 million crimes are being committed in this country and 31 million are never detected, the only way to truly reduce crime is to find some way to stop some of the crime from being committed in the first place."[58]

In the words of Hawkins and Catalano, "It is as if we were providing expensive ambulances at the bottom of a cliff to pick up the youngsters who fall off, rather than building a fence at the top of the cliff to keep them from falling off in the first place."[59]

Notes

• Race, on the other hand, does not appear to be a factor in youth's propensity to violence. Though African-American youth tend to grow up at far greater risk than their white peers, Elliott reports that the ratio of black-to-white youth who ever engage in violence is only 5-to-4. Blacks are far more likely to be *arrested* than whites, however, and they are significantly more likely to continue their violence into adulthood. Elliott suggests this disparity is related to blacks' greater difficulty finding and holding jobs and to their lower marriage and stable cohabiting rates. "In essence, race and poverty are related to successfully making the transition out of adolescence and into adult roles," he writes.

•• In an attempt to address these problems, the state of Colorado approved model legislation in 1993 requiring that violent youth offenders (ages 14-18) receive adult-length sentences but serve them in youth-only correctional facilities.

Does it Work?
The Effectiveness of Crime Prevention

"Violence is not a random, uncontrollable, or inevitable occurrence... Although we acknowledge that the problem of violence involving youth is staggering... there is overwhelming evidence that we can intervene effectively in the lives of young people to reduce or prevent their involvement in violence."[60]

American Psychological Association
Commission on Youth and Violence

The intellectual case for prevention is compelling. Without prevention, we face untold spending on prison construction and incarceration, yet hold little hope for meaningful crime reduction. Prevention, on the other hand, appears to hold significant promise *as a complement* to the enforcement approach. We know which kinds of children are at risk. We understand what factors can place them at risk. And we know a good deal about the protective factors—the skills, attitudes, supports and opportunities—that can inoculate them from the dangers of delinquency.

If prevention programs can use this knowledge successfully to address the developmental deficits that lead toward delinquency, they will deliver a significant breakthrough in our nation's struggle against crime. If not, these programs will pour taxpayers' money down the sinkhole of good intentions, validating their critics' warnings.

This chapter examines a broad array of approaches to reduce crime among unincarcerated youth at risk for delinquency: community-wide strategies, behavior management and conflict resolution programs, recreation programs, counseling programs. It also examines a range of other youth-oriented interventions—some targeted to assist high risk families and children generally, others focused on development and rehabilitation of adolescents already involved in crime, and still others targeted to high risk youth but not specifically aimed at delinquency prevention.

This review includes programs that are not based in the criminal justice system. Only by examining such a wide array of programs can this report accurately reflect the youth development focus on averting delinquency that is espoused by many experts. "Programs that adopt a youth development orientation... provide adolescents with the full range of supports necessary for them to prepare for adulthood. Indeed, this is the focus of the 'best prevention programs,'" wrote Shepherd Zeldin and Howard Spivak in a 1993 paper for the Center for Youth Development and Policy Studies. "When the environment engages the adolescent, and provides him or her with appropriate experiences (e.g., sustained adult relations, cooperative activities with peers, high expectations, responsibility, recreation) not only is violent behavior prevented, but the young person is more likely to move successfully toward adulthood."[61]

Deciphering Prevention's Record

So what is the record of programs falling under this broad prevention umbrella? No unequivocal answer to this question exists as yet. Delinquency prevention programs have never been implemented on a massive scale and many have operated on a shoestring. Many have not been implemented fully or effectively, and few have been subject to careful evaluation.

As recently as 15 or 20 years ago, the consensus on delinquency prevention among leading criminologists held that "nothing works." Looking at rehabilitation programs for juvenile offenders, one widely cited 1974 study found that "with few isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have no appreciable effect on recidivism."[62] Three years later, another scholar concluded: "The blanket assertion that 'nothing works' is an exaggeration, but not by very much."[63]

Since then, however, the conventional wisdom has reversed. "Within the last decade... a number of programs have shown that antisocial behavior can be reduced with preventive interventions," writes Alan Kazdin of Yale University. "Improved results appear to have resulted from better understanding of the emergence of antisocial behavior, implementation of comprehensive and protracted intervention programs, and more careful evaluation of long-term intervention effects."[64]

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The Power of Early Intervention. Though most intervention programs lack definitive evaluations and some have shown themselves to be ineffective, a number of prevention models have documented powerful effects either on adolescent delinquency or on pre-delinquent behavior among younger children. By far the most dramatic of these are early interventions aimed at children (and their families) in the first five years of life.

Participants in the Perry Preschool program in Ypsilanti, Michigan proved far less likely to commit crimes than a matched control group, for instance. By age 19, fourteen years after completing this two-year program of developmental preschool and weekly home visits, only 31 percent of participants had ever been arrested—compared to 51 percent of the control group. By the time they turned 27, one-fifth as many Perry participants as control group members had been arrested five or more times (7 percent vs. 35 percent), and one-third as many had been arrested for selling drugs (7 percent vs. 25 percent).[65]

A home visiting and parent development program for low-income families in Houston, Texas, also produced significant results related to delinquency. The program trained mothers to be more affectionate, more responsive, and less punitive toward their newborns. Five to eight years later, program children exhibited less fighting than a control group, and they were less disruptive, less impulsive and less restless—all behaviors with proven links to subsequent criminality.[66]

Likewise, children in the Yale Child Welfare Project showed significantly less aggression, disobedience, lying, and cheating than control youth ten years after their parents took part in a home visiting program that provided parenting skills and job counseling. As in other programs, the benefits of intervention were not limited to delinquency-related behavior. At the 10 year follow-up participating parents were less welfare dependent, better educated, and had fewer children than control parents; youth were less likely to require special education.[67]

In Syracuse, New York, a day care assistance and home visiting program for poor mothers with preschool-age children also produced dramatic results. Longitudinal follow-up found that only 6 percent of children from families participating in the program were ever processed in juvenile court, compared with 22 percent of a randomly assigned control group. Moreover, crimes committed by program participants were far less serious than those committed by control group youth. The average juvenile justice cost per child for the preschool home-visiting group was $186; for control group youth it was $1,985.[68]

Clearly, prevention can curb crime and delinquency. If programs target high risk children and their parents early in life, and if they provide intensive and extended (two years or more) counseling, education, and parenting assistance via highly skilled youth development professionals, prevention efforts yield powerful reductions in later aggressiveness, delinquency, and criminal behavior.[69]

What Works for Older Children and Youth? But the crime prevention agenda does not begin and end with early childhood. What is the record of other intervention strategies—particularly those aimed directly at adolescent and pre-adolescent youth? Here the record is murkier and more mixed.

In general, prevention programs fall into two types. The first is strictly *preventive*, aimed at the general youth population in a given community. The impact of these efforts is difficult to evaluate. Even if it does help lessen the propensity of teens toward delinquency and violence, most observers would agree that a new youth center or recreation program or 10-day "anger management" unit in the school health curriculum is unlikely on its own to reduce the overall juvenile crime rate. And even if the crime rate does drop, evaluators have no way to discern for certain whether the program or some other factor is responsible.

The second type of program is *intervention*, those efforts aimed at controlling or reversing the problem behavior of particular youth. Their impact is somewhat easier to measure. And, though the vast majority of intervention programs are not evaluated and many evaluations that are undertaken suffer serious methodological flaws, a number of programs have been evaluated thoroughly.

Recently, Mark Lipsey of Vanderbilt University completed a "meta-analysis" aggregating the findings on 443 intervention programs for which solid evaluation data are available. He reported that overall, the programs did decrease the delinquency and recidivism of treated youth—but only by about 10 percent. That is, if before the program youth had a 50-50 risk of future delinquency, their chances, on average, were 45 percent after participating. "The answer to the general question 'Does treatment reduce delinquency?' therefore appears to be 'Yes, on average there is a positive effect,'" Lipsey reported. "But while positive and significant, the mean effect sizes found here appear relatively modest."[69]

At first glance, this modest impact might lend support skeptics. But a closer examination of the data reveals grounds for substantial optimism. Some types of programs produced large positive effects; others demonstrated no effects or even negative effects. "The best of the treatment types... show delinquency effects of meaningful practical magnitude," Lipsey declared.[70]

What are the characteristics of effective delinquency prevention programs? How do they differ from ineffective or counterproductive programs? The following pages examine the available evidence. The lessons that emerge are varied and complex. Yet the general finding is straightforward: the consensus today is delinquency prevention programs "can work." In fact, these programs often do work—but only when they are intensive, oriented to youth development, multi-dimensional, carefully designed, effectively implemented, and constantly evaluated with an eye to improving program performance.

Helping Youth Before Trouble Starts

This section examines an array of efforts designed for the general population of youth, including those at risk. These include recreation programs; conflict resolution, mediation, gang prevention and other school-based prevention programs; programs for academic enhancement, dropout prevention, and employment training; plus more comprehensive initiatives tying several of these components into a community-wide youth development-crime prevention strategy.

Recreation and Midnight Hoops

As the battle raged on Capitol Hill in 1994, one line item in the proposed crime bill captured more attention than any other: $40 million for late night sports leagues. Though this represented only half of one percent of prevention's piece of the bill (and barely one one-thousandth of the entire bill), Republicans made midnight basketball "the Willie Horton of the crime bill."[71]

The program became a magnet for rhetorical grenades. "Presumably kids are supposed to get out of bed in the middle of the night to go play basketball so they won't get involved in crime," wrote one commentator in the *Wall Street Journal*. "Imagine the conversation between two muggers," suggested pollster Frank Luntz. "One looks at his watch and says to the other, 'Hey it's already 10:30. We'd better get one more mugging in before the game begins.'"[72]

Yet before receiving their first dime in federal funding, midnight sports leagues have already spread to dozens of cities all over the nation—often with enthusiastic support and cooperation from local law enforcement officials. While the impact of these leagues has not been formally evaluated, there is evidence that they can indeed reduce crime. The original league—located in Glenarden, Maryland—was launched in 1986 after local officials recognized that most of the town's crime occurred between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. Glenarden opened its recreational facilities during these hours, and as a condition for participation required the players—young men between 17 and 26—to attend life skills workshops and observe a strict code of conduct. Once the league started, "There was a 60 percent drop in drug-related crime," reports the Prince George's County police chief, David Mitchell. In the Winton Hills section of Cincinnati, public housing residents responded to a crime epidemic by launching late-night and weekend basketball along with other supervised recreation activities. In the program's first 13 weeks, reported crime dropped by 24 percent.[73]

Advocates of midnight basketball emphasize that their programs are about much more than sports. In Chicago, for instance, applicants to the league must first participate in a month-long "boot camp," then attend mandatory life skills workshops after each game. Any player who gets in trouble with the law is expelled from the league. Despite the fact that many of the 1,200 players who've participated since 1989 have a history of delinquency, only one player has been banished for criminal activity.[74]

A Columbia University study of Boys & Girls Clubs in public housing projects provides additional evidence that safe and constructive recreational opportunities can lessen crime. The study found that public housing projects containing a Boys & Girls Club had crime rates 13 percent lower than projects without a Club. Prevalence of drug activity is 22 percent lower in projects with a Club, the study found, while crack presence is 25 percent lower. "The influence of Boys & Girls Clubs is manifest in [youths'] involvement in healthy and constructive educational, social and recreational activities," the study concluded. "Relative to their counterparts who do not have access to a Club, these youth are less involved in unhealthy, deviant and dangerous activities."[75]

No reputable expert suggests that recreation alone—at midnight or any other hour—can solve

the urban crime problem. But especially when it is integrated with education, training, and other services, and when it is offered through community-based organizations that provide youth with formal and informal counseling, recreation can help reduce crime.

School-Based Violence Prevention Curricula: Conflict Resolution

Another element of the 1994 crime prevention package is conflict resolution. Along with other short-term, school-based violence prevention curricula, conflict resolution programs have swept the country in recent years and become a standard teaching tool in thousands of middle schools and high schools. Though these curricula have not been damned like midnight basketball, they too are a matter of some controversy.

In the winter of 1993, Johns Hopkins University violence prevention scholar Daniel Webster published an article in the journal, *Health Affairs*, entitled: "The Unconvincing Case for School-Based Conflict Resolution Programs for Adolescents." Despite the fact that he had previously participated in designing and evaluating such programs, Webster pronounced himself "skeptical that existing conflict resolution programs can reduce interpersonal violence."[76]

Chances are "remote," Webster wrote, that "adolescent conflict resolution curricula, in the absence of changes in families and communities, will produce significant reductions in serious injuries resulting from violence." Most classroom curricula addressing other adolescent health risks (i.e., substance abuse, teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS) have not effected substantial or sustained behavior change, he asserted. Webster also cited preliminary evaluations of three high profile conflict resolution curricula—two of which seemed to produce little impact. And Webster reasoned that most existing conflict resolution curricula are developmentally and culturally ill-suited to inner city adolescents and ill-equipped to make a significant impact on youths' behavior.

Reaction to the article was vehement. Four rebuttals appeared in *Health Affairs* condemning the integrity and the accuracy of Webster's analysis. They faulted Webster for equating "absence of evidence" with "evidence of absence," noting that conflict resolution's unproven record is the result of unfinished program evaluations rather than documented program failures. The critics also lashed out at Webster for failing to acknowledge his past affiliation with one of the programs criticized. And they noted that two of the three models reviewed by Webster have since yielded additional evaluation data—both showing positive impacts on participants' attitudes toward violence and skills in avoiding it.[77]

Such short-term, self-reported changes may or not not translate into reductions in aggressive and violent behavior, however. And in the absence of controlled long-term outcome evaluations, the impact of conflict resolution remains a matter for debate. Webster is not alone in voicing doubts. "School officials are responding [to serious violence by and against adolescent students] by adding violence prevention programs—often a commercially available 'off-the-shelf' package—to their schools' already overcrowded curricula," Marc Posner of the Education Development Center wrote recently in the *Harvard Education Letter*.[78] William DeJong of Harvard University added in *Health Affairs* that—like the recreation programs discussed earlier—"school-based education programs alone cannot address the deeply rooted problem of youth violence plaguing our nation... Changing the social norms that sustain violent behavior will require a broad-based effort involving families, the mass media, and entire communities."[79]

"Violence prevention may prove most effective when it is one of a number of services offered as part of a 'full-service school'," Posner suggested.[80] One program that has taken this message to heart is Resolving Conflicts Creatively (RCC), based in Brooklyn, New York. This year-long program—which now involves 4,000 teachers and 120,000 students in 250 schools—teaches students skills and techniques to resolve conflicts peaceably, encourages teachers to grant students a measure of control in the classroom, and empowers some students as "peer mediators" to find peaceful solutions to classmates' disputes. Aiming to change the overall school environment, RCC provides extensive and ongoing teacher education, and it has begun training parents to lead workshops and involve other parents in the RCC process.[81]

In a 1990 evaluation, 70 percent of participating teachers reported that the program reduced classroom violence and name-calling. Many students, too, said they engaged in fewer fist fights and less name calling following participation. While that evaluation did not measure long-term impacts on students' out-of-school behavior (a more thorough evaluation is in progress) the preliminary results and the RCC's subsequent improvements suggest that this program has significant potential to alter students' attitudes about conflict and their conduct.[82]

Other School-Based Programs. A number of other school-based prevention programs have also shown encouraging if not yet definitive results. Several cities have been offering gang prevention curricula in recent years to dissuade young students from gang participation. In Paramount, California, the local human services department developed a 15-part "Alternatives to Gang Membership" curriculum that its staff delivers each year to fifth grade students. The curriculum which has been replicated in a number of other California communities and in Hawaii, is reinforced by an eight-session follow-up for seventh graders. It also includes parent and community awareness meetings.

A post-program evaluation found that prior to the program 50 percent of the students were undecided about joining a gang; by program's end 90 percent were opposed to joining one. Follow-up studies have found that students continued to report anti-gang attitudes years later, and most say they have not joined a gang. Researchers warn that these data should be taken with a grain of salt, however. "Self reports about gang membership have serious problems," concludes the Education Development Center, as students may be biased by their desire to give the "right" answer.[83]

Peer mediation programs have reportedly reduced the amount of fighting in schools and improved the learning climate. School authorities in Charlotte, North Carolina credit their program with reducing assaults by and against students by 50 percent. A New York-based program has reportedly reduced the number of suspensions for fighting in participating schools by 50-70 percent since it was introduced 10 years ago.[84] These programs have not been subject to rigorous evaluation, however. "Although peer mediation has intuitive appeal," prevention scholars report, "its efficacy has simply not been determined."[85]

Another school-based model is Law-Related Education (LRE). Aspects of LRE have been adopted by schools in at least 40 states. The concept is simple: young people who understand the law and its benefits to them are more likely to respect and obey it. Activities for students in elementary through high school grades include mock trials, interactive classroom exercises, visits to courtrooms, and work in the community with lawyers, judges and police. In one evaluation, ninth-grade students in an LRE course (taught one class period per day for an entire semester) reported significantly less delinquent behavior than those in a control group. It is not clear whether this improvement sustained itself over time, however, or translated into reduced violence in the community.[86]

Summing Up: School-Based Prevention Curricula. Despite the sharp attacks they leveled against him, none of Webster's critics challenged his contention that: "Brief interventions that are not reinforced outside the immediate training environment cannot be expected to alter difficult-to-change behavior."[87] Posner concluded that "a ten-session prevention course cannot overwhelm the deprivations of a life of poverty or the pressures toward violence in the world outside school."

Yet, "while violence prevention programs are not *the* solution," Posner continued, "carefully designed, targeted, and implemented programs with good teacher training and technical support can be part of the solution." Webster, too, conceded that "well designed curricula could... be useful components of more comprehensive community-wide strategies that involve parents, community leaders, mass media, advocacy, and law enforcement."[88]

Preparing Youth For Adulthood: Education and Training in High-Risk Communities

Completing an education and making a successful entry into the labor market are critical variables in the delinquency equation. "Prevention of delinquency appears to be embedded in the prevention of school failure," wrote Joy Dryfoos in 1990. "The acquisition of basic skills appears to be a primary component of all prevention."[89] Joblessness, likewise, is frequently cited as a key contributor to crime in depressed communities.

If youth stay in school and learn, and if they are able to make a successful transition from school to work, their chances of succumbing to crime and delinquency will be minimal. Thus, the conventional wisdom suggests, programs to enhance academic achievement and foster gainful employment become central to fulfilling the crime prevention agenda.

But what is the record of education and training programs for at risk youth in reducing delinquency and crime? The answer is at best mixed.

Educational Interventions. On one hand, research finds that education and delinquency are closely intertwined. Two educational variables—poor reading achievement and weak commitment to school—are particularly strong predictors of future delinquency. And early school failure is one of the key early warning signs of future delinquency.

Moreover, several intervention programs for at-risk students have proven successful in redressing

basic skill deficits and promoting school completion. Title I, the federal government's main remedial or compensatory education program for schools serving disadvantaged communities, has been shown to improve participants' reading and math scores by 15-20 percent compared with similar needy youth.[90] Computer-assisted remedial instruction, like that provided in hundreds of learning centers nationwide through the Comprehensive Competencies Program, has generated even more impressive results—boosting achievement test scores by 1.0 grade level in reading and 1.4 grade levels in math for every 28 hours of instruction.[91]

To date, however, there is little evidence that academic skills remediation has a direct effect on adolescents' propensity to crime and violence. According to Anne Dryden Witte of Wellesley College and Florida International University, "If education is to have a major crime-reducing impact, it appears that the impact will arise from educational programs' socializing and supervisory roles not from their primary educational activities."[92] In short, youth at risk for delinquency have a more immediate need for support and discipline than they have for academic skills.

So-called "alternative schools" offer one method for educators to enhance the socialization and supervision of high-risk youth. These programs typically work with a small number of students and provide individual attention, self-paced instruction, peer counseling, leadership training, parental involvement, and a student-centered climate. A study of 17 such programs found that they promoted "greater safety, reduced teacher victimization, and less delinquency."[93]

Dropout prevention is another widespread strategy. Most school districts engage in some efforts to promote school completion, often with modest resources and to little effect. But the Ford Foundation-supported Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP) demonstrates the potential impact of intensive and well-conceived dropout prevention. In each of five cities, QOP provided counseling, academic enhancement, life skills instruction, community service projects, and financial incentives to 25 welfare dependent students throughout their high school years. Compared to randomly assigned control groups, QOP participants were 50 percent more likely to graduate high school on time, 150 percent more likely to attend postsecondary schools, and one-third less likely to have children. In addition, QOP participants were almost 50 percent less likely to be arrested during the four years of the program.[94]

Probably the most important educational interventions, however, are those that improve the overall environment of entire schools. School restructuring is about much more than delinquency prevention, of course. Yet improving the school environment can be a critical step toward improving youth's attachment to school and their motivation to learn—both critical factors in determining the propensity to crime and violence.

Before James Comer of Yale University initiated fundamental restructuring at Brennan-Rodgers and King elementary schools in New Haven 20 years ago, the schools' achievement levels (two to three years below national norms) were among the city's worst. The student population at the schools was overwhelmingly poor, and more than 50 percent came from welfare dependent families. Comer's process to break the cycle of underachievement included three central components: (1) a new management team, led by the principal and including teachers, parents, counselors and other school staff, was empowered to set overall policy for the school; (2) parental involvement in the school was increased dramatically, with parents being recruited to organize school events and to serve as classroom assistants; and (3) focused intervention was provided for children who displayed emotional, behavioral or academic problems.

The process worked. The schools which once fell at the bottom of New Haven's 33 elementary schools ranked third and fourth best by 1984. Despite the high risk student body, attendance rates at King rose to best in the city in the early '80s. Moreover, reported Comer, "We haven't had a serious behavior problem in the schools we're involved in over a decade." The Comer model has now been replicated in several other cities around the country, also with excellent success.[95] And several other school change models have also produced promising results. Though no data have been reported measuring the impact of these impressive school change programs on subsequent delinquency, research shows clearly that early school failure and behavior problems are important precursors to adolescent crime and violence.

Job Training Programs. As the Crime Bill worked its way through the legislative process in 1994, there was initial bipartisan agreement on the need for increased opportunities for job training leading to economic self-sufficiency. Supporters successfully urged that residential boot camps include education and training programs for non-violent youth offenders and that the states model their curriculum after the 30-year-old Job Corps. A neighborhood-community wide "saturation model"—Y.E.S., Youth

Employment and Skills, offering youth employment training coordinated with other essential support services—passed both houses of the Congress. In the frenzied, election-eve struggle over alleged "pork" in the Crime Bill's conference report, however, Y.E.S. was eliminated.

Despite widespread political support for employment training for youth,[95] there are no recent long-term evaluation studies of large-scale and comprehensive interventions such as Job Corps or the newer Youth Fair Chance (Title IV-H of the Job training Partnership Act), although studies of both are underway.[96]

What few evaluations do exist focus on measuring only "earning gains" and are usually for short-term, quick-fix, skills training programs—five months or less in duration. Not surprisingly, evaluations of these short-term programs have not found significant increases in participant earnings or reduced risks of delinquency among adolescents. "The relationshipbetween lack of employment and crime or drug use found among adults does not seem to hold for adolescents," concludes the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. "Working youth have levels of delinquency and drug use equal to or higher than their nonworking counterparts."[96] A recent national evaluation of the Job Training Partnership Act also found that participating youth had higher reported arrests than non-JTPA youths in a control group.[97]

The migration of jobs away from inner city areas has been a key factor in the demise of many communities and the attendant rise in violent crime over the past 30 years.[98] Ultimately, reducing crime will depend on far greater availability of good jobs and adequate preparation for well-paying careers. Short-term, narrowly-focused youth employment training programs have not proven to be an effective vehicle for achieving those goals. Broader, developmental, community-wide interventions—advocated by many youth employment experts—have yet to be subject to meaningful evaluation.

Multi-Dimensional, Community-Wide Prevention

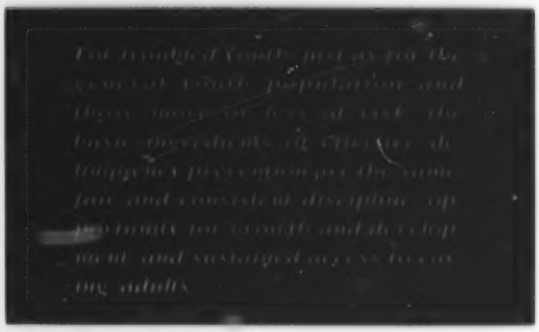
The most successful of prevention programs do not fit neatly into a single program category. They are not strictly recreation programs, or conflict resolution, or remedial education or job training. Rather, most programs with impact are multi-dimensional: they intervene simultaneously on several fronts to address participants' varied needs, tap their hidden potential, provide them individualized attention from caring adults—be they counselors, coaches, teachers, youth agency staff, or volunteer mentors.

Thus, the best school-based violence prevention programs supplement classroom instruction with outreach to parents and members of the community. Recreation programs affect behavior most when they provide counseling and life skills training as well as sports and arts and crafts. "The use of multicomponent programs is reasonable because many high-risk behaviors and conditions co-occur," writes Alan Kazdin of Yale University. "Narrowly focused and or brief programs would not be expected to have significant and enduring impact. Moreover, multiple components may be required to address the many influences (family, peers, media) that may unwittingly promote or contribute to at-risk behavior."[99]

Community-Wide Action. In fact, many experts believe that the greatest potential for prevention lies not in any single program, multi-dimensional or otherwise, but in acomprehensive, community-driven continuum of programs—what Hawkins and Catalano have dubbed a "communities that care" strategy. "Because community approaches are likely to involve a broad spectrum of individuals, groups, and organizations, they create a greater base of support for behavior change," they write. "The community-wide focus creates a unique synergy: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."[100]

A recent study by the Search Institute in Minneapolis demonstrates the crucial contribution of a community's environment to the delinquency of youth. Investigators interviewed young people and assessed them as "vulnerable", "average", or "high-asset" based on their answers to 30 questions about family, school, peers, and personal habits and beliefs. Investigators also rated communities as healthiest, average, or least healthy based on the percentage of 9th-12th grade youth engaged in at-risk behaviors (i.e., tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, sex, anti-social behavior, etc.). Though the study looked at primarily white, middle class areas in the Midwest, its findings are instructive: In all community types, vulnerable youth are more likely than other youth to engage in risky or delinquent behaviors. However, vulnerable youth in the healthiest communities are far less apt to engage in at-risk behaviors than vulnerable youth in least healthy communities.

"A healthy community not only benefits youth who already have many assets in their favor, but is particularly powerful in protecting vulnerable youth who have fewer personal assets (such as strong families) in their lives," the study found. "Schools,



churches and synagogues, youth organizations, and the general support of structured activities are clearly influential in shaping a healthy community for youth."[101]

"Rather than simply zooming in on single segments of society," the Search Institute concluded, "it's time to pull back to a wide-angle view and examine how whole communities have an impact on youth, both positively and negatively."[102]

One city that has acted on this belief is Fort Myers, Florida, which used a $1.7 million federal grant to implement its comprehensive "Success Through Academic and Recreational Support" (STARS) program for high risk youth ages 11-14. The program, developed through a city-wide planning process and involving a dozen public and private agencies, provides a variety of academic enrichment, organized recreation, and other activities. Since STARS began, juvenile crime rates have declined for three consecutive years in Fort Myers—with the overall rate falling by almost one-third. Among 11 and 12 year-old offenders city-wide, the rate of repeat criminal behavior dropped 64.3 percent. For 13 and 14 year-olds the rate dropped 26.3 percent. "As the mayor of a city that totally committed itself to using recreation and academic support as the vehicle for combating violent juvenile crime, I can tell you first hand that it works," said Fort Myers Mayor Wilbur Smith.[103]

As one of seven cities participating in the Texas City Action Plan to Prevent Crime, San Antonio, Texas has also employed a comprehensive, community-wide prevention approach to excellent effect. Its approach includes recreation and academic enrichment for youth in after-school programs, new anti-crime partnerships between community residents and police (including training for city residents in community policing techniques), and new penalties—both for youth *and their parents*—when youth under 17 carry weapons, paint graffiti, or violate a curfew banishing them from the streets during late night or school hours. In the first year after this approach was implemented, San Antonio saw a 10 percent drop in criminal arrests for juveniles and a 50 percent drop in juvenile victimization.[104]

Incorporating Youth Leadership and Service. One of the more innovative features of the San Antonio program is a "Leadership Program for Teenage Girls" in eight middle schools. Rather than merely keep youth "off the streets" and "fix" problem behaviors, San Antonio leaders elected to recognize and cultivate young people's desire and capacity to contribute. Their program reflects a growing understanding among prevention and youth development experts that, in the words of Hawkins and Catalano, "children must be provided with opportunities to contribute to their community, their school, their family and their peers."[105]

Another demonstration of this philosophy comes in the National Crime Prevention Council's "Teens, Crime, and the Community" (TCC) program, in which youth learn crime prevention techniques and apply the knowledge in community service projects addressing crime problems in their schools and neighborhoods. An evaluation of the program found that in addition to providing valuable service to their communities, participating youth know more about how to avoid becoming crime victims and are less likely to exhibit attitudes associated with delinquent behavior or to associate with delinquent peers.[106]

Probably the nation's most widespread teen community service initiative is "Youth As Resources" (YAR), developed and administered by the National Crime Prevention Council. Forty-five thousand youth participated in 39 YAR programs between 1987 and 1993, including many from high risk as well as middle class neighborhoods. Among youth residing in juvenile detention or foster care settings who participate in YAR, 91 percent report that they feel proud or very proud of their efforts, and 87 percent feel that they have helped someone or something.[107] "Research is clear that a sound sense of self-esteem is a key to averting self-destructive behaviors like delinquency and drug use," writes National Crime Prevention Council executive director, Jack Calhoun.[108] "If there's one thing kids in the treatment system... have in common," Calhoun says, "it's that they don't feel they have anything to contribute."[109]

Another impressive group of programs employs a "teen empowerment" model to attack the problems of urban crime directly. These programs rely on paid youth organizers—including many from high risk backgrounds—to sponsor events and activities for other neighborhood youths and engage their peers in a process to address common concerns. When it

was first developed in Somerville, Massachusetts in the 1970s. Teen Empowerment was credited by local police with helping to reduce crime rates. The model has since been replicated in nine other Massachusetts communities, as well as a 15-site citywide initiative in Louisville, Kentucky.[110]

In April 1994, Teen Empowerment youth organized and ran a day-long "peace conference" for 600 youth in Boston's South End area where gang members and other feuding youth agreed to resolve lingering disputes. In August 1994, 200 youth and adults—including members of rival gangs—joined in a Teen Empowerment peace march.[111] Though Teen Empowerment has not been evaluated formally, its impact is widely appreciated. Commenting on former Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn's choice to cut funding for Teen Empowerment in the late 1980s, the *Boston Globe* editorialized that the city "lost valuable years in identifying and training those neighborhood adolescents who are best able to exert positive social control over their peers... The South End-based nonprofit Teen Empowerment organization... remains an untapped resource."[112]

As a multi-agency federal task force on violence concluded in January 1994, "Quite simply, the problems of youth violence and high-risk behavior will never be solved without the leadership and active involvement of young people themselves."[113]

Coupling Youth Initiatives with Community Policing. Perhaps the most impressive crime prevention demonstrations to date have been in cities—like San Antonio—that incorporate youth-oriented prevention programs into larger community-driven anti-crime initiatives. Lansing, Michigan reduced crime by 60 percent in two troubled neighborhoods after opening a "neighborhood network center" led jointly by a community police officer and representatives of a social service agency and local schools. Initially, the effort focused on coordinating responses to drug dealing, vandalism, truancy, open consumption of alcohol, feuding among families, and child abuse. An extensive youth program soon became central to the initiative—beginning with a club for ten boys in the 5th grade, then expanding to girls and involving both the Boy and Girl Scouts of America and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Also, the Neighborhood Network Center frequently supervises delinquent Lansing youth sentenced to community service—helping them develop work skills and build a sense of community ownership and attachment.[114]

In Norfolk, Virginia, the Police Assisted Community Enforcement program (PACE) likewise forged a new partnership between community police, human service agencies, and local citizens to serve six troubled public housing projects and four other high crime neighborhoods. Athletic leagues were formed to give young people the opportunity to participate in team sports, and a Norfolk Youth Forum was organized to provide opportunity for 250 high school students to speak out and propose solutions to community problems that affect them. Through these youth efforts, combined with stepped up community-aided law enforcement and enhanced social services, PACE led to a 29 percent drop in crime in the 10 targeted neighborhoods and a citywide reduction in violent crime.[115]

Summing Up: The Case for Prevention

While more and more communities throughout America are launching comprehensive, jurisdiction-wide strategies to promote prevention, successes like those in Norfolk, Lansing, San Antonio and Fort Myers are not yet the norm in crime prevention.

Rather, youth-oriented prevention efforts have produced a mixed bag of results. Experience shows that some prevention programs work well and really do seem to reduce crime and delinquency. Others reduce problem behaviors in the short-term but may or may not result in reduced criminality over time. Still other programs simply don't work—producing no immediate or long-term reduction in delinquent conduct.

Given the deep psychological and sociological roots of delinquency, and given the large and heterogeneous target population served by underfunded prevention programs, these mixed results are hardly surprising. Prevention is no piece of cake.

But in light of the tremendous economic and social costs our nation is liable to incur by proceeding only with law-and-order approaches to crime, the many promising efforts presented here provide more than sufficient testimony to prevention's potential. A concerted national effort to build on and replicate effective prevention models would seem an excellent investment.

Treating Troubled Youth

This section examines targeted interventions for youth already exhibiting problem behaviors, including shock incarceration, individual and group counseling, outdoor adventures, behavioral and attitudinal training, and family-based interventions. It also reviews a variety of developmental and

rehabilitative treatments and dispositions for already convicted juvenile offenders.

Prevention can work. By engaging children and their families early in life to set them on a trajectory toward healthy development, by providing recreational and educational opportunities tied to caring adults in prosocial environments, by teaching conflict resolution, mediation, and other social skills and tying these skills into the context of youths' every day lives, and by linking these efforts together in comprehensive community partnerships against crime, prevention programs are finding ways to help keep kids out of trouble.

But on their own, these initiatives are not sufficient. "It is unlikely that primary prevention will be unequivocally successful across the full range of at-risk behaviors and conditions that contribute to aggression," writes Yale's Alan Kazdin.[116]

"A significant disadvantage of primary prevention programs is that they typically consist of a uniform intervention provided to all members of a given population," explain University of Illinois at Chicago prevention scholars Tolan and Guerra, writing with Rodney Hammond of Wright State University. "The general orientation and short duration of most programs suggests that they may have only limited impact on changing the behavior of more serious and chronically violent youth." Guerra, Tolan and Hammond conclude. "It is likely that such programs are most beneficial for adolescents who display milder forms of age-typical aggressive and antisocial behavior."[117]

Given the great danger to public safety posed by a small number of seriously violent children and youth, targeted interventions are also required to help (or push) high risk youth off of the pathway to chronic crime and violence. "It is unlikely that youth who have progressed from childhood aggression to more serious and habitual adolescent violence will respond to broad-based educational and or social development programs," write Guerra, Tolan and Hammond. Treatment programs, on the other hand, "target those individuals who should benefit most from the services. Not only are overall costs reduced, but programs can be tailored more specifically to the needs of the targeted group."[118]

What works and doesn't work in the treatment of aggressive and delinquent behavior among youth? The record reveals several clear findings—both for and against the use of specific treatment approaches.

Family Therapy and Parental Skills Training

Interventions focused on the family systems of problem youth have proved a powerful weapon for addressing delinquent and aggressive conduct. Several family-oriented treatment strategies have demonstrated strong and lasting positive effects on even highly disturbed youth. As the Office of Technology Assessment reports, "Several studies have shown that, in the short term, family systems approaches cut recidivism rates by half in comparison with more traditional forms of psychotherapy... and no-treatment comparison groups and have a greater impact on child and family functioning than other types of therapy."[119]

Functional Family Therapy is one model with proven results. This approach aims to identify unhealthy patterns of interaction within the family, then provide family members remedial instruction in communication, negotiation, problem-solving, and other family management skills. In a carefully controlled study, functional family therapy (FFT) lowered the recidivism rates of delinquent youth up to 18 months after treatment, while siblings of treated youth showed significantly lower rates of delinquency two and one-half years after treatment.[120] FFT also showed positive results working with 30 chronic adolescent offenders with an average record of 20 prior offenses each. After being treated with FFT, 40 percent were not subsequently charged with a criminal offense, compared with only 7 percent of a matched sample of chronic offenders receiving traditional treatment.[121]

Parent Management Training is another model that has documented strong effects. One experiment training the parents of 3-8 year-old children with conduct problems yielded significant improvements in child behavior in comparison with control group youth, and the changes had persisted one year after treatment. Overall, 67 to 78 percent of the children whose parents received the training returned to a normal range of behavior.[122] Other studies have also documented the effectiveness of parent training.

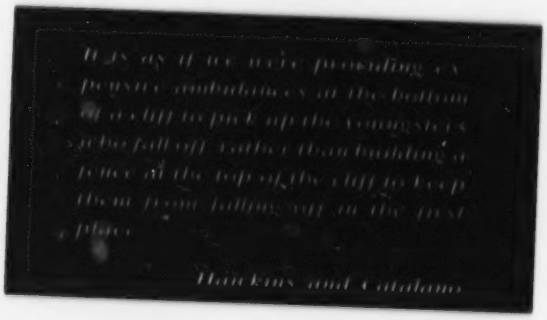
While most research has focused on younger children ages 3-12, recent studies have found parent training effective with older adolescents as well. In one study working with parents of 55 boys (mean age 14) who had committed at least two offenses, youth in the treatment group committed significantly fewer offenses than control group youth during the treatment year and spent significantly fewer days incarcerated during both the treatment year and the following year.[123]

Another promising family intervention strategy is *Multisystemic Family Therapy* (MST). In this model, family therapy and parent training are combined with assistance to help families address practical problems. The reported results are dramatic. In one study, youths receiving MST were arrested about two thirds as often as control group youth, and MST youths spent an average of 74 fewer days incarcerated than control youths in the 59 weeks after referral to the program. Overall, 38 percent of the MST youth were arrested following treatment, compared with 58 percent of youth receiving conventional services.[124]

"There is clear evidence that family-targeted interventions that focus on improving parent behavior management skills, promoting emotional cohesion within the family, and aiding family problem solving are effective," Tolan and Guerra conclude. "[Family treatment] has the most evidence for effectiveness [of any treatment modality]."[125]

Cognitive and Behavioral Skills Training

If family therapies have "the most evidence" of effectiveness of any approach for treating delinquency, then cognitive and behavioral skills training ranks second.


It is as if we were providing an
expensive ambulance at the bottom
of a cliff to pick up the youngsters
who fall off, rather than building a
fence at the top of the cliff to keep
them from falling off in the first
place.
Hawkins and Catalano

Psychological research has found that aggressive and delinquent youth typically display thought patterns far different than other youth. As Kazdin explains, "Aggression is not merely triggered by environmental events, but rather by the way in which these events are perceived and processed."[126]

Delinquents tend to be deficient in identifying nonviolent solutions to conflict situations and foreseeing the consequences of violent actions. They tend to act impulsively, unable to control anger and other emotions. In many ambiguous social situations, they attribute hostile intentions when none is intended. Many delinquent and trouble-prone youth also hold attitudes and beliefs justifying the use of aggression; many derive self-esteem and improve their self-images through aggressive behavior.[127]

In recent years, a host of programs has been developed and tested to redress these gaps in social problem-solving skills. Several approaches have documented positive crime-prevention effects.

One method is *social perspective-taking*, in which delinquent youth are asked to develop, act out and critique skits related to real-life conflict situations. In one study of social perspective-taking conducted in the early 1970s, 45 serious juvenile offenders met in small groups three hours per day over ten weeks. Compared with control groups, these youth improved their social perspective skills and significantly reduced recidivism for up to 18 months after treatment.[128]

A closely related method is *moral reasoning* training. Here, too, the effects have been positive. "Behavior disordered" 7th through 10th grade students who were randomly assigned to weekly small group discussions about moral dilemma situations received fewer disciplinary actions and had fewer police contacts than similar students assigned to a control group. Treatment and control youth continued to diverge one year after the program was completed.[129]

Another often-used strategy is *anger management* or self-control training, but here the research evidence is less conclusive. Since 1983 Arnold Goldstein and his colleagues in Syracuse, New York have been developing, testing and packaging for replication a process called "Aggression Replacement Training" (ART). In a 1989 monograph they presented data finding that ART dramatically reduced the recidivism of youth recently released from detention.[130] However, a 1994 research review by Tolan and Guerra dismisses these findings and complains instead that "the evaluation of its effects has been minimal and results are not promising in terms of reductions in aggressive and violent behavior."[131]

Social problem-solving typically combines several cognitive-behavioral skill training techniques. In a 1987 study by Kazdin and colleagues, 7-13 year-old children hospitalized for uncontrolled aggression and antisocial behavior were trained by therapists to apply prosocial skills in their interpersonal interactions. Compared to children receiving conventional psychotherapy or simple play therapy, these children showed significant behavioral improvements.[132]

In a number of studies with institutionalized delinquents, social problem-solving programs have

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reduced criminal conduct. After youthful offenders and their parents in one study were trained in interpersonal and problem-solving skills, recidivism rates dropped to barely half those of a control group (24.3 percent versus 42.7 percent), and those who did recidivate committed less serious offenses than did recidivating control youth.[133]

Tolan and Guerra attribute these successes to the programs' broad scope: "The efficacy of social problem-solving programs may be tied to the fact that they typically are more comprehensive in scope than other cognitive interventions and frequently include training in self-control, anger management, perspective-taking, and attitude change."[134]

Shock Incarceration

The most popular approach in recent times for straightening out wayward youth has been "shock incarceration," better known as boot camps. Since the first correctional boot camp opened in Oklahoma in November 1983, the idea has spread like a wild fire. Today, 30 states and 10 localities operate boot camps, as does the federal government.[135]

"Born in the first wave of official desperation over booming prison populations in the 1970's and early 80's, boot camps were supposed to take young criminals, most of them first-time offenders who were engaged in nonviolent acts like burglary and drug dealing, and shock them back into good behavior," explains the *New York Times*. "Several months of tough treatment, of minute-by-minute supervision by uncompromising drill instructors, would instill discipline and a desire never to repeat the experience or, perhaps worse yet, be sentenced to a regular prison."[136]

Unfortunately, the strategy does not work. Outcome research has consistently found that the recidivism rates of boot camp graduates are no better than those of convicts sentenced to traditional prisons. Doris MacKenzie and Claire Souryal of the University of Maryland recently completed the most comprehensive study to date, evaluating the boot camp programs of eight states. "The impact of boot camp programs on offender recidivism is at best negligible," they found.

Despite these chilling results, boot camps have retained their popularity among lawmakers, fueled by countless newspaper and television accounts "in which heavily perspiring, straining lawbreakers are endlessly drilled, routinely shouted at and unequivocally required to undertake drug and alcohol rehabilitation, do schoolwork and perform labor like highway cleanup."[137] But however photogenic and politically appealing, boot camps cannot escape their disappointing record. As the MacKenzie study concluded: If success is measured in terms of recidivism alone, there is little evidence that the in-prison phase of boot camp programs have been successful."[138]

Boot camps' apparent failure echoes the experience of another popular intervention for young, first-time offenders: "Scared Straight." In that program, rather than being subjected to the rigors of intensive physical training at the hands of a drill sergeant, young first-time offenders were berated by adult convicts with the realities of prison life. Evaluations of Scared Straight found that the program actually increased the recidivism of participating youth.[139]

From all evidence, it appears that juvenile offenders cannot be shocked into abiding the law; they cannot be scared straight. Scare-oriented programs "create more delinquency than they cure, says criminologist Mark Lipsey. "The idea of taking an acting-out adolescent and giving him a role model for verbal abuse and macho behavior seems to me a poor strategy."[140]

"No one should delude themselves that this boot camp, military drill instruction alone is going to straighten everybody out," New York State Assemblyman Daniel Feldman told the *New York Times*. "I thought it would. A lot of us thought it would. But it doesn't."[141]

Psychotherapy and Other Counseling

"Individual psychotherapy has traditionally been a cornerstone of rehabilitative efforts with delinquent youth," report Guerra, Tolan and Hammond.[142] Yet, research has not found psychotherapy an effective strategy for reducing delinquent behavior. "When the treatment goals are global and vague (such as self-awareness) and when the treatment description is similarly nonspecific and extremely brief (such as providing a warm relationship with the therapist and helping the delinquent achieve insight into his/her behavior), reductions in subsequent delinquent behavior are rarely achieved," report Donald Gordon and Jack Arbuthnot of Ohio University.[143]

In many cases, psychotherapy is offered in conjunction with "social casework." In effect, troubled youth are assigned a social worker who both provides counseling and coordinates whatever social services might be required. According to Tolan and Guerra: "Although this approach is a mainstay of juvenile justice and social services, the literature indicates that it is not effective in preventing or mitigating serious antisocial and violent behavior.

even when services are carefully delivered and comprehensive."[144]

Behavior Modification. Behavioral therapies have also been used widely in the treatment of trouble-prone youth—both in schools to reinforce attendance, academic achievement and good classroom behavior, and by juvenile justice programs to reward positive behavior among youth in detention or on probation.

Research finds that these efforts often produce positive results in the short term. Yet, as Gordon and Arbuthnot conclude, "Very few of the studies demonstrating successful behavior change have shown reductions in recidivism, long-term maintenance of behavior change, or generalization across different settings. Thus the individual behavioral approaches offer only limited promises and directions."[145] Tolan and Guerra reach a similar conclusion: "One of the most common problems with clinic-based behavior modification programs has been that treatment effects do not persist over time after reinforcement contingencies are withdrawn, and often there is a lack of generalization of the results across settings."[146]

In one experiment where behavioral techniques were applied in a community setting, results *did* persist over time. In this program, chronic delinquents were paid by street-corner workers to participate in discussions intended to recruit them out of gangs and into more positive activities. Over the course of one year, participating offenders were only one-half as likely as the control group to be arrested, and three years after the intervention participants had significantly fewer arrests and had spent significantly less time incarcerated than the control group.[147]

Peer Group Counseling. Another set of delinquency treatments has focused on shifting peer group norms and recruiting at-risk adolescents away from deviant groups. The results have been mostly disappointing. Probably the most widespread approach to peer counseling has been a daily discussion group process called Guided Group Interaction (GGI). Evaluations in community-based treatment settings and juvenile institutions have found GGI ineffective, while for participating high school students GGI has actually worsened behavior—increasing lateness, "waywardness," and self-reported delinquent behavior compared with a no-treatment control group.[148]

One community-based treatment program has used peer group counseling successfully, but only when problem adolescents are grouped together with non-antisocial peers. In this "St. Louis Experiment," youth referred by schools and courts for behavioral problems were placed in activity and counseling groups. Some included only referred youth; others mixed referred youth with non-referred peers. Evaluators found that antisocial behavior decreased almost twice as much in the integrated groups as the delinquent-only groups—though even the integrated groups did not yield significant improvements in behavior or lawfulness over a no treatment control group.[149]

The record of interventions to recruit at-risk adolescents away from youth gangs or to influence gang members toward less antisocial activity is less clear. What evidence exists is not promising, however. In one study, 800 gang members were treated to athletic and social events and provided academic tutoring. Perhaps because these activities increased the amount of time gang members spent together, the intervention actually led to more criminal behavior. "Although gangs have been identified as a significant factor in adolescent violence," Tolan and Guerra report, "very few data have supported the efficacy of interventions aimed at redirecting gang activities or reducing recruitment of new gang members."[150]

Two **multi-dimensional preventive treatment** programs, both involving schools, warrant mention. The first randomly assigned problem 7th graders in an urban school to treatment and control conditions. Over a two-year period, treated children received a broad battery of school-based supports, including daily monitoring, structured reinforcement for good behavior, biweekly teacher consultations, and periodic meetings with parents. At the end of the two years, treated youth showed significantly better grades and school attendance than control youth. A year later treatment youth had significantly lower rates of self-reported delinquent behavior. Five years after program completion, by which time they averaged 19.5 years of age, treatment youth had committed fewer delinquent and criminal offenses than control youth.[151]

The second noteworthy intervention is the Positive Adolescent Choices Training (PACT) program for high-risk African American adolescents. In a recent study, researchers randomly assigned 169 adolescents to treatment and control groups, then provided treatment youth 20 one-hour training sessions on negotiation, compromise, and giving and taking criticism calmly. The program also used a series of culturally sensitive videotapes on anger management. Three years after the training, just 17.6 percent of PACT youth had been referred to juvenile court, compared with 48.7 percent of control youth. Of those referred, PACT youth were less

likely than controls to be charged with a violent offense.[152]

Rehabilitating Juvenile Offenders

By most people's definition, programs to rehabilitate youthful offenders are not "prevention." But the fact remains, selecting the proper punishment or other disposition is one of society's best opportunities to influence the conduct of young offenders.

Each year approximately 700,000 youth are sentenced to juvenile correctional facilities, and the population of juveniles serving time in adult prisons is almost 500,000.[153] Recidivism rates for youth leaving juvenile facilities hover as high as 70 percent in some states.[154] Thus, today's incarcerated juveniles look very much like tomorrow's criminals.

Just as important are the juvenile offenders not held in custody. More than half of the million-plus youth referred to juvenile court each year are never charged with an offense. Most are referred for minor delinquent offenses. Instead of being charged these nonpetitioned youth are either dismissed (49 percent), placed on probation (29 percent), or ordered to some other disposition (22 percent). Likewise, many youth who are charged in juvenile court are never tried. Even a majority who are tried end up with probation or an alternative (non-prison) disposition. Overall, just 9 percent of youth referred to juvenile courts are sentenced to a detention facility.[155]

Providing meaningful supervision and effective treatment before these unincarcerated delinquents lapse into serious criminality represents a further opportunity for prevention—perhaps the last best chance both to protect the public and save young lives. Unfortunately, in most cases, this opportunity is being missed.

Diversion and Other Treatments for Unincarcerated Juvenile Offenders

"The juvenile justice system is based on the notions that juveniles are more capable of reform and less responsible for their actions than adults," writes the Office of Technology Assessment. "Consequently, the concept of retribution and punishment might be expected to be less pronounced in the juvenile justice system than it is in the adult criminal justice system."[156]

True to this philosophy, so-called "diversion" programs have long been a key element of juvenile justice. By their nature, these programs have several immediate benefits: they save taxpayers the heavy cost of housing youth in correctional facilities; they protect youth from the stigma of a juvenile record; they allow youth to remain in school (and possibly work as well); and they shield youth from exposure to a large population of deviant and delinquent adolescent peers.

Diversion programs also have potential to offer one more benefit as important as all the others combined: the opportunity to provide delinquent youth the types of effective treatments detailed in this report—family interventions, carefully designed cognitive skills training, and the like. Unfortunately, research shows that historically, this opportunity has been foregone far more often than not.

Several past studies have found that, as a whole, diversion programs have not reduced the recidivism of delinquent youth. One study examined 44 diversion programs reported on between 1967 and 1983. They employed a wide variety of treatment techniques, including group psychotherapy, casework, behavior therapy, individual psychotherapy, and educational vocational guidance. The investigators reported that for these programs "diversion interventions produce no effects." A study of four federally-funded diversion projects from the same period—these providing individual or group counseling plus access to other services—revealed that the projects were no more effective in stemming delinquent behavior than either court processing or release.[157]

Many scholars believe that the concept is sound but that only it's implementation has fallen short. "Most programs have provided some type of vaguely-formulated, non-specific services, rather than theoretically-driven and solidly-developed interventions," explain Guerra, Tolan and Hammond. "Perhaps the most critical feature of any intervention, the guiding rationale, has been virtually overlooked."[158]

These scholars point to a number of more recent, better-formulated diversion programs that *have* significantly reduced delinquent behavior among diverted youth. One carefully evaluated 18-week diversion program provided delinquent youth intensive contact (6-8 hours per week) with college student volunteers trained and supervised by graduate students under the guidance of university faculty. Participants in the program had lower arrest rates than comparable control group youth as long as two years after program completion. These results have been replicated in several studies, and Kazdin concludes that this model "represents a viable and well-replicated intervention for reducing the severity of dysfunction in youths apprehended for offenses."[159]

Another program, "Family Ties" in New York City, has found noteworthy success with nonviolent delinquents referred from juvenile courts. Over an intensive 4-8 week intervention period, program counselors (called "family preservationists") train youths in social problem solving and anger management skills, provide parenting assistance, monitor youths' school attendance and performance, and broker a range of other public services for both the youths and their families. A June 1993 program evaluation found that eight in ten program participants remained uninvolved in the juvenile justice system six months after treatment. Re-arrest, reconviction and reincarceration rates for program youth were less than half those in a comparison group.[160]

In addition to diversion, several other approaches to treating unincarcerated delinquents have also had a positive impact. One promising strategy is restitution, where youthful offenders are ordered either to repay their victims directly or perform a specified period of service to the community. A study of restitution in Utah found that "recidivism is significantly lower when restitution is included in the disposition of juvenile cases." This positive impact held for informal (non-adjudicated) cases as well as formal court-ordered probation decrees.[161]

Youth sentenced to intensive probation in lieu of incarceration have been found to have recidivism rates roughly equal to their peers who are incarcerated, and the crimes committed by probation youth who reoffend are typically less serious than those committed by formerly incarcerated youth. Yet the cost of intensive supervision ($26 per day) is less than one-third the $88.54 per day cost of a juvenile jail commitment.[162] When probation officers in Bucks County, Pennsylvania were relocated to work directly in schools, the academic performance of probation youth improved 22 percent and absenteeism dropped 29 percent. The number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions declined dramatically.[163]

For serious delinquents (with a mean of 18 prior offenses including 11.5 felonies), the Florida Environmental Institute (FEI) provides an intensive 18-month rehabilitation program based in the Florida Everglades. The program includes four phases: a 3-5 day outdoor orientation experience, an initial phase of work projects and education while youth sleep in a non-air conditioned military-style dormitory; a second phase where they move to an air-conditioned, military-style dormitory with television and begin to earn money toward restitution or savings; and a final phase of intensive after-care in the youths' home communities. Evaluations find that FEI participants have far lower recidivism rates than youth assigned to training schools (45 percent versus 60 percent), even though 80 percent of the training school youth have criminal records less serious than the FEI participants.[164]

Another promising (but controversial) approach, "VisionQuest," offers a year-long series of outdoor adventures as an alternative to traditional incarceration. The controversy emanated from allegations of tough treatment of youth at the hands of program staff combined with injuries suffered by youth during storms and other emergencies. An independent evaluation by the RAND Corporation found that VisionQuest participants—delinquent youth from San Diego with a mean age of 16.3 years and an average of 8.4 prior arrests—had a lower recidivism rate (55 percent) than youth serving time in a San Diego County work camp (71 percent), sentenced to California Youth Authority training schools (88 percent), or released into community treatment programs (68 percent).[165]

Community vs. Institutional Detention

The final piece of the delinquency prevention puzzle involves reducing the future criminality of the million-plus youth who are in custody. For youth who have already amassed a long record of serious and violent offending, rehabilitation may not be a realistic goal. For them, if they are not locked away for life under a "three strikes and you're out" laws, the only hope may be that they will mature out of their violence, as many do as they grow older.

But the striking fact is that only a small proportion of youth serving in juvenile or adult detention have been convicted of violent crimes. According to a recent study examining the juvenile corrections

systems of 28 states, only 14 percent of new admissions to juvenile corrections were youth convicted of serious violent crimes. Over half the youth in custody were committed for property or drug crimes and were experiencing their first confinement to a state institution.[166] Even among youthful offenders sentenced to adult prisons, only 34 percent were convicted of crimes against persons (as opposed to property or drug crimes), and not all of these involved the threat or use of serious violence.[167]

Given the high per capita costs of juvenile incarceration and the alarming recidivism rates, such extensive detention of nonviolent youth may well be counterproductive. In fact, Massachusetts leaders decided just that in 1972 when they closed the states' juvenile training schools and replaced them with a continuum of community-based programs offering a full spectrum of care as well as aftercare—some secured with locked doors and guards, others not.

Today, Massachusetts reserves its secure treatment beds mainly for a relatively small number of chronic violent offenders; they are confined there for an average of 8-12 months. After that period, these youth can be transferred to community-based programs so long as they abide by explicit "conditions of liberty." For juvenile offenders without a record of chronic violence, the stay in secure confinement is generally shorter before transfer to one of a range of a non-secure community treatment facilities. Misconduct by these youth can result in transfer either to a guarded facility or a more structured community program.

This less restrictive approach to juvenile detention, often combined with restitution, has not led to higher crime. Less than 1 percent of persons arrested in the state are youth in the care of the juvenile justice system, and recidivism rates of Massachusetts juvenile offenders are as low as or lower than those of most other states. More telling, Massachusetts' overall juvenile crime rate remains one of the lowest in the nation.[168] Meanwhile, the states' costs to provide this structured, community-based treatment system are estimated to be $11 million less those of operating correctional training schools.[169]

Though the Massachusetts juvenile justice system experienced some difficulties in the early 1990s due to budget cuts and overcrowding,[170] several states (Utah, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, and others) have begun to follow Massachusetts' lead and close their training schools. Preliminary data indicates that they too are experiencing lower recidivism and juvenile crime.[171]

In a recent report, Michael Jones and Barry Krisberg of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency listed the ingredients required for effective treatment of violent youth in custody: continuous case management, close attention to the home and community environment, clear and consistent consequences for misconduct, enriched academic and vocational programming, and family and personal counseling matched to the particular needs of the adolescent.[172]

The similarities between that list and the characteristics of programs that have proven successful with other delinquent youth are striking. For troubled youth, just as for the general youth population and those more or less at risk, the basic ingredients of effective delinquency prevention are the same: fair and consistent discipline, opportunity for growth and development, and sustained access to caring adults.

Toward the Future

The preceding pages have highlighted the promise of many emerging or established strategies to curb the criminality of young people. Their promise is real. It represents the best hope for America to combat the persistent curse of violence and crime.

These pages have also documented the failure of several prevention strategies and treatment programs to limit adolescent misconduct. That fact should not be minimized.

"Although many programs have demonstrated positive impact," Kazdin writes, "several humbling exceptions are available in prevention research in general where programs have not worked or have demonstrated deleterious effects."[173] In fact, though the state of the art in prevention advanced considerably in recent years, many delinquency prevention efforts have been strung together on limited budgets by individuals unaware of emerging findings in prevention research and lacking both the funding and the inclination to evaluate their programs rigorously.

"Well-intentioned efforts are being applied to many children and adolescents without any indication of their effects," explain Tolan and Guerra. "it is usually hard to imagine that a good idea put into action by well meaning and enlightened people cannot help... Also, given that adolescent violence is such an injurious social problem, it may seem that any effort is better than nothing. Yet our review and several of the more long-term and sophisticated analyses suggest that both of these assumptions may be dangerously wrong... Evaluation is urgently needed to help us sort out what is helpful, what is

harmless but ineffective, and what will actually make the problem worse,"[174] they conclude.

This issue ought not dampen enthusiasm for the cause of prevention. Rather, it only underscores the fact that, time and again, the prevention and intervention strategies that have proved successful are carefully tailored, informed by research, and effectively implemented. "We believe the key to real progress in adolescent violence is to obtain a solid empirical base," Tolan and Guerra argue. "This need for an empirical base does not imply that action should wait. The need for research is so urgent *because* there currently are so many programs affecting so many adolescents, families, schools, and communities at such large cost and operating under the aura of much promise."[175]

Violence in America is an epidemic. But unlike other public health emergencies, there has been no national commitment to research its causes and cures. In 1993, the National Research Council estimated that federal funding for research on violence totalled only $20 million per year—just $81 for each year of life lost due to violence. That compares to $794 spent on cancer research for each year of life lost, $441 for research on cardiovascular diseases, and $697 for research on AIDS.[176]

Careful design, rigorous implementation, and continuous refinement of delinquency prevention and treatment programs, combined with sound evaluation and research, offers America's brightest hope to contain the crime epidemic and perhaps even begin to bring it under control.

Notes

*** Less intensive early childhood interventions have not demonstrated long-term impacts, however. Head Start programs—which generally last only one year and are taught by less skilled instructors than the Perry Preschool program—have shown substantial immediate impacts on intellectual and social developments, but long-term evaluations find that these effects do not sustain themselves over time. (Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Impact of Head Start on Children, Families, and Communities: Head Start Synthesis Project*, 1985.)

**** For example, see the Appendix for a National League of Cities survey of municipal leaders that gives high priority to employment training for youth.

***** A Job Corps evaluation using data from the 1970s found a 15 percent earnings gain, "significant reduction in serious (felony) crime," a large increase in GED attainment, doubled college enrollment, and a social benefits return of $1.46 per dollar invested. Cited in U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Chief Economist, *What's Working (and What's Not)* (Washington, D.C., January 1995).

politics aside, can a national crime strategy based solely on increased incarceration—coupled with other 'law and order' remedies like the death penalty and truth-in-sentencing measures to try juvenile offenders as adults—make a significant dent in the American crime problem? A hard look at the criminological evidence suggests the answer is no.

Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest irony of the current furor over crime is that in absolute terms, crime rates have not been at an historic high in the 1990s. Overall crime rates have continued to decline from their all-time record in 1981, and violent crime—though rising in recent years—remains below the records set in 1981. The percentage of American households victimized by crime in 1992 was the lowest since that measure was introduced in 1975.[177]

This is not to say that the nation's crime problem isn't serious—or growing more worrisome in important respects. Increasingly, the victims of violent crime in America are youth. While the nation's overall homicide rate has held steady in recent years, the number of teenagers murdered has soared—more than doubling since 1988.[178] Murder is now the leading cause of death among black males ages 15-24, and it is the second leading cause of death among white males 15 and 24.[179]

Contrary to popular perception, this alarming trend is not due to a substantial increase in the number of violent acts committed by youth. According to Delbert Elliott, "About the same proportion of youth are committing serious violent offenses today as in 1980 and their frequency of offending is approximately the same." The difference today is that "violent acts are more lethal," Elliott finds. "And this dramatic increase in lethality is explained almost entirely by the increased use of handguns in these violent exchanges."[180]

In a recent survey by the National Institute of Justice, 22 percent of inner city high school students reported owning a gun, and two to three times that many reported that a family member or a friend owned one.[181] This widespread availability of firearms has had dramatic effects: the number of murders by juveniles using guns jumped 79 percent in the past decade, and nearly three of every four murders by 10-17 year-olds now involve firearms.[182] As one reporter explained, "An assault by a young thug that might have produced bruises 10 years ago is more likely to result in a gunshot wound or death—and consequently and arrest—today."[183]

The availability of firearms is beyond the scope of this report, of course. So too is the rampant violence in movies and on television that contributes directly to violent and antisocial attitudes and behavior by youthful viewers.

Yet these issues ought not be ignored completely in a thoughtful review of the crime problem, because they illustrate once more a central truth about crime: The propensity of individuals to commit violent and antisocial offenses—and the likelihood that each of us will be victimized—depends on much more than law enforcement and criminal justice.

Effective policing and a competent and sure criminal justice system are essential to public safety. Whole communities must be engaged with police in identifying and apprehending chronic criminals. And serious violent offenders, particularly, must be locked away for long stretches. Yet the evidence is clear: On their own, these law and order efforts stand little chance of sparing Americans the anxiety of suffering with the developed world's highest violent crime rates.

The environment that surrounds youth—the family, school, community, and media influences that help shape them in childhood, the presence or lack of sustained guidance from caring adults, the availability of positive recreational, educational, and developmental opportunities—are also crucial in determining whether young people remain on the right side of the law.

For the most part, young people do not avoid crime from fear of punishment, for the most part. They avoid crime out of respect for themselves, concern for others, a belief in their future prospects and an internal sense of personal and public morality. Developing this internalized morality, fostering in young people the skills and the will to avoid crime, is the business of the whole community and the key to youth-oriented crime prevention.

In some detail, this report has reviewed the effectiveness of many prevention approaches. Both among preventive programs for the general youth population and more targeted treatments for youth already engaged in delinquent or trouble-making behaviors, it has found substantial grounds for optimism. Many strategies show considerable promise to reduce crime.

Research and evaluation must play a central role in the development of prevention programs and systems. Program outcomes must be continually monitored to ensure that our efforts are doing some more good than harm, and to tailor and re-tailor

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efforts to the specific needs of their target populations.

At the national level, we should undertake an extensive research program to refine knowledge about what works, why, and for whom? Much remains to be learned about effective crime prevention. Available evidence suggests that indiscriminate expenditures do little good. But we do know enough to move forward—and certainly the need is urgent.

The time has come for America to use its second arm in the struggle for safety, to provide the criminal justice the support it needs to combat crime effectively. Prevention is that other arm.

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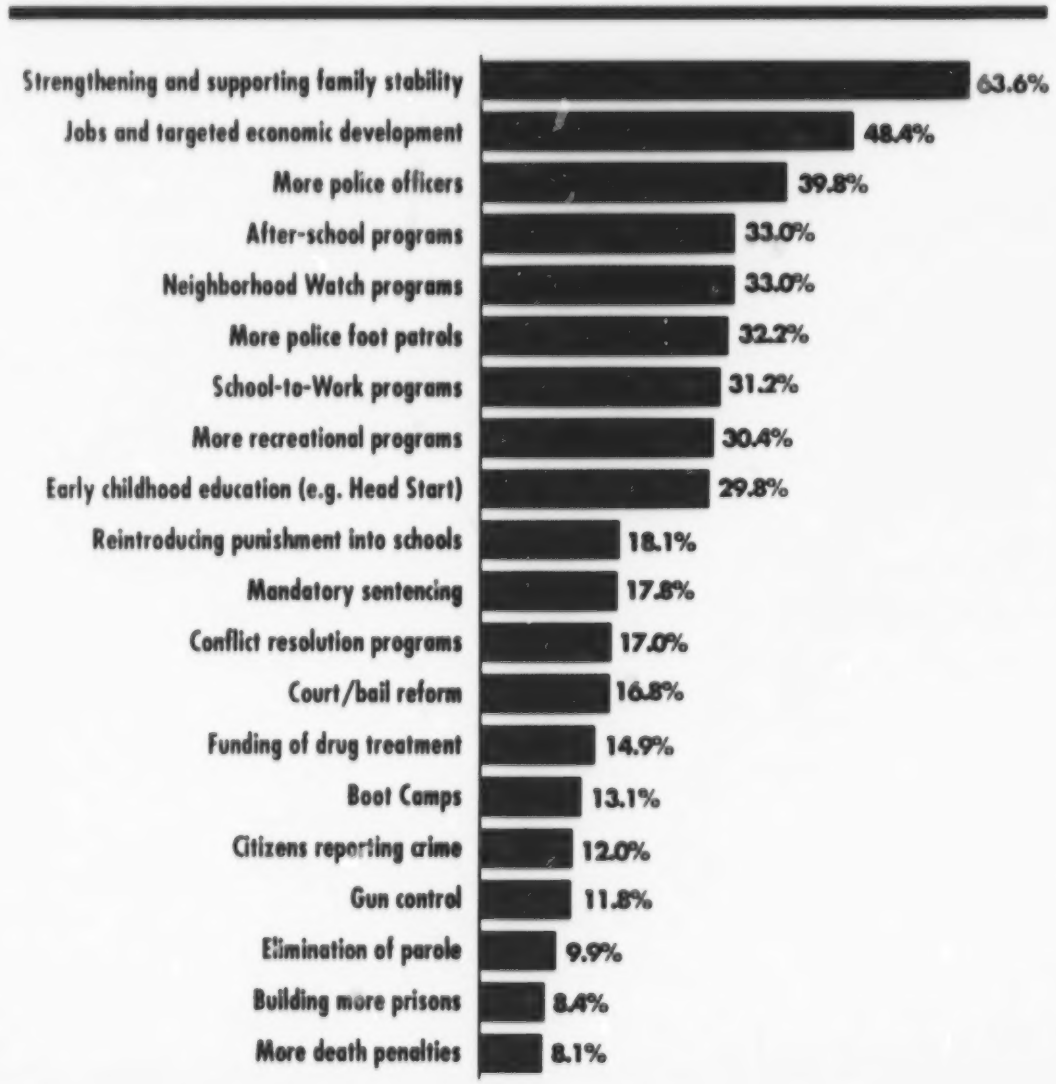
APPENDIX

After the completion of this report, the National League of Cities published its annual survey of municipal officials. "Assuring public safety" was among the three highest priorities of the 383 elected municipal officials (drawn from a random sample in cities with populations of 10,000 or more) who responded to the survey.

Relevant to Richard Mendel's study are the municipal leaders' beliefs about the measures most likely to improve public safety. According to *Nation's Cities Weekly* (January 23, 1995), these officials expressed a strong preference for "*a mix of strategies* designed to achieve desired outcomes instead of focusing strictly on enforcement or prevention. (Emphasis added.) The most preferred policy—"strengthening and supporting family stability, selected by 64 percent—reflects a growing sentiment that public safety needs to be considered in a much broader context than traditional anti-crime solutions."

The policies and programs believed by municipal officials in the NLC survey as most likely to reduce crime are:


Strengthening and supporting family stability 63.6%
Jobs and targeted economic development 48.4%
More police officers 39.8%
After-school programs 33.0%
Neighborhood Watch programs 33.0%
More police foot patrols 32.2%
School-to-Work programs 31.2%
More recreational programs 30.4%
Early childhood education (e.g. Head Start) 29.8%
Reintroducing punishment into schools 18.1%
Mandatory sentencing 17.8%
Conflict resolution programs 17.0%
Court/bail reform 16.8%
Funding of drug treatment 14.9%
Boot Camps 13.1%
Citizens reporting crime 12.0%
Gun control 11.8%
Elimination of parole 9.9%
Building more prisons 8.4%
More death penalties 8.1%

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